

## The Use of Twitter in Language Learning and Teaching

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### Abstract

*The technology has been affecting all the fields with its improvement during the last century. People are becoming more and more engaged in technological activities and the more they are engaged, the more they enjoy it. It has affected all the fields including banking, shopping, news, etc. It would be silly if education were to skip the technology and its various applications. From various applications, it is the social networking that has drawn the attention of most people. Both being easy to access and easy to use, social networking sites have become a very effective tool to communicate and exchange ideas. People all over the world use blogs, forums, various kinds of social networking sites to keep up with their friends and current news. Twitter is one of the most popular microblogging applications and it allows its users to communicate by short messages. Due to the fact that both the students and the teachers have Twitter accounts, education can make use of Twitter. It can also be used before, during and after the teaching-learning process. This paper examines the positive use of Twitter in language learning and teaching.*

*Key words: Twitter, language teaching, Web 2.0, ICT, language learning.*

### 1. Introduction

Microblogging is a Web2.0 technology, and a new form of blogging that let the users publish online brief text updates, usually less than 140-200 characters, sometimes images too. The posts can be edited and accessed online, or sent as SMS, e-mail or via instant messaging clients. Usually the microblog authors embed its posts as a widget on blogs or sites. Microblogging enables a real-time interaction between users, using different devices, technologies and applications. One of the best known microblogging services is Twitter [1]. Twitter is a microblogging service that allows users to communicate with others by posting brief messages (so called updates) that describe their current status. Most recently, microblogging platforms acquired attention of educational practitioners and researchers [2].

In Twitter, the people basically answer a question, "What is happening?" Through this way, people all over the world can communicate with each other. There are some hashtags (#example) people can easily find the comments about the topic from all over the world and can keep up with the latest news easily. Twitter has a social network of subscribers, or followers. Users create a profile ID, which is displayed as @username, and "each user submits periodic status updates, known as tweets, which consist of short messages of maximum size 140 characters.... and these tweets may be forwarded to other followers in an action known as retweeting" (Asur & Huberman, 2010, p.2) [3]. Users may subscribe, or follow, anyone who has an account with Twitter. This immediate form of communication is extremely updates in real-time and with businesses and corporations for promotions and marketing (Asur & Huberman, 2010, p.2).

By using Twitter, the people can exchange information about both the details of their life and their professional experiences. However, it is really important to differentiate between two. If you want to share information not only about your personal life but also your professional life, it is a good idea to have different accounts because the people you follow or the people following you can be different in terms of this aspect. There may be sincere followers of you and there may be some others you don't know face to face. It wouldn't be appropriate to make Twitter spam both for you and for the people following you.

### 2. Why using Twitter in language learning?

Relevance: many students already use Twitter in their own language and so may well be interested in using it in their target language. It has become a part of social, business and academic discussions and it has already entered mainstream communication.

Quick: the conciseness of twitter writing means that it is quick to do. So it is easy to add to other learning activities, be it in the classroom or for homework.

Distinct style: the brevity of twitter (each message is limited to 140 characters) means that the writing has a different style from other online writing (e.g. emails and blog posts). Although approximately the same length of an SMS message, the tweet has a different style; abbreviations such as "gr8" for "great" are not generally used in micro-blogging.

Conversational: using Twitter is a chatty way to communicate and mimics the quick succession of comments in a normal conversation [4].

### 3. Good points of Twitter usage in education

Twitter can have a positive impact on educational actors due to some **good points** as follows [5]:

- It engages education and shares the best practices that a teacher is using in his/her classroom.
- It changes classroom dynamics.
- It is very useful to get helpful information.
- It can serve both as a means of analysis and an object of analysis.
- It connects people that one would not have met otherwise.
- It keeps track of a conversation students carry on a particular topic.
- It's fun and gives students more insight into what's really going on in courses
- It's a good way of making a quick announcement.
- Its being limited to just 140 characters really focuses the attention, it's developed its own sort of discursive grammar set, requiring a great deal of summarizing (even synthesizing, on occasion).
- The virtual aspects of schooling are well represented in Twitter posts.
- It may be useful for our professional development and building a true educational community.
- Teachers make themselves available.
- Teachers are connecting their students to the real world.
- It gives the students a sense of what a person is like outside of the classroom (they end up being a lot more comfortable with classroom discourse).
- It makes us feel nice about being human (quieter students can be heard).
- It provides age-appropriate environments.
- Students use Twitter as a tool that supports reflection.
- Twitter is micro-blogging which many times is much more efficient than RSS feeds [Davis, 2008].
- Twitter is purposeful, curriculum-centered but not curriculum-bound.
- The teacher can post lecture notes.

### 4. How to make use of Twitter in foreign language learning?

Twitter can be used between teachers and students, students and students in the same class, students and students in another country, as a tool for the entire class or for pair/group work. Work on Twitter can take place in the classroom or outside (home computer, mobile devices...). Through Twitter, all these actors are able to share and look for information, be (co-) creative and socialize in foreign languages in asynchronous (like on a forum) or synchronous ways (like chatting). Tweets can also be used to ask questions and hunt for instant points of view. For teachers, Twitter can allow them to boost task-based learning (Dervin, 2009), interactivity and collaborative learning which encourage the students to "achieve common learning goals by working together rather than with the teacher"(Macaro, 1997). Thus the teacher can play the role of a facilitator and guide rather than the "know-it-all supervisor". The renewed contacts between the students and the teacher through Twitter can also boost their respective trust and lead to increased motivation and trigger a more informal level of conversation (which is not always "negative") [6].

So what can be done with Twitter? The following ideas are divided into two categories: outside (set as homework) or inside the classroom. Let us start outside the classroom [7]:

#### Outside the classroom

##### *Reading*

- Follow the "life" of somebody the students know abroad or not and write a report on what they learnt about the person (one very good example is British actor Stephen Fry's Twitter which is updated daily at <http://twitter.com/stephenfry> - his Twitter is very interesting especially when he travels abroad; cf. also Twitchhiker at <http://www.twitchhiker.com/> who travelled the world moneyless and counted on Tweepers to help him.
- 'Read a book that has been tweeted (e.g. Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliette at [http://twitter.com/romeo\\_\\_](http://twitter.com/romeo__));- Tweet a book they are reading and/or co-create a story ("continue the story").

#### *Writing*

- Brainstorm on a theme, a grammar lesson... to prepare for the next lesson or during a certain period of time;- Hold a learning diary (language and intercultural learning) to be shared with others and discussed in class or online.

- Chat with classmates or students from other schools/countries about their daily lives, opinions or whatever topic is being covered in class and discuss the results in class.

#### *Listening*

- Listen to Boos (<http://audioboo.fm/> i.e. a short audio message) over a certain period of time and write a summary of each entry.

#### *Speaking*

- When travelling abroad or staying abroad, students can regularly post oral tweets telling their classmates and teachers what they are doing, what they have seen, spoken about, etc.

#### During Lessons

##### *Reading*

- The 'silent lesson': nobody is allowed to interact orally for 20 minutes and all the interaction between the teacher and students take place in written form on Twitter.

##### *Writing*

- The students are asked to leave one Tweet-question each before the beginning of or during a lesson, to which the teacher answers orally.

- Write summaries based on reading or listening activities in concise manners (140 characters are allowed per tweet to compress a story).

- Write, rehearse and send an audio "Boo"(cf. supra);- Organize opinion polls (through inserting a Tweetpoll at : <http://twtpoll.com/>); - Make a "to-do" list.

##### *Listening*

- Ask the class computer to Text-to-Speech (TTS) or play back tweets in a spoken voice for the class teacher - students comment on what they hear or repeat (this function is available on most computers).

##### *Speaking*

- Live-tweet, e.g. while listening to a teacher, students live tweet what they heard to students in another country ("Twitterpals") or simply to help other students who need support ("Peer support");- Translate/interpret in one's own language "live"(the teacher writes sentences in the foreign language and the students propose a translation).

## **5. Conclusion**

The advantage to using a tool like Twitter for education is that it's instant and it's to the point. Twitter, and social media in general, can make a surprisingly useful educational tool, giving students and teachers an easy way to communicate that goes beyond office hours and classrooms. With the use of a simple hashtag (#), it becomes incredibly easy to curate tweets, giving students an easy way to follow the information that is associated with a specific class. Alternatively, teachers can create accounts or Twitter lists specific to a course that students can then follow, making it easy for them to find each other on Twitter. Twitter can also replace many tools you already use such as mailing lists for announcements, and social media in general can completely change the way that students submit and receive their assignments, using tools such as Flickr, YouTube and a blogging platform, like WordPress or Tumblr [8].

Finally, it can be emphasized that using Twitter in foreign language learning can be very innovative and effective as long as it is used by the teachers and students both for educational and personal aims appropriately.

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