USING TWITTER FOR LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

Twitter (http://www.twitter.com) is one of several applications (two more are Pownce and Jaiku) that facilitate microblogging, which is the posting of short messages to the Web. Microblogging evolved from the "away" and "status" messages of instant messaging and social networking applications like Facebook. "Tweets" can be read and sent via instant messaging programs, e.g., AIM, gTalk, and via cell phones capable of text messaging (SMS) but they don't necessarily assume a response. In other words, they are a one-to-many form of communication that can be completely mobile.

Using Twitter

Go to *http://www.twitter.com* and sign up for a Twitter account. Then begin finding twitter streams to follow. Two easy ways: (1) ask friends if they have accounts and who they follow, and (2) start looking for media-related sites. Clicking on a stream's icon will give you the option to follow that stream. Turning on notifications allows you to follow the stream via SMS and IM.

Don't forget to click the **Settings** link in your account to "protect" your updates, i.e., take them out of the public timeline. The **Phone & IM** setting allows you to set up notifications by SMS and Instant Messaging.

Twitter Clients

Twitter can be used through its web site, SMS, and instant messaging. There are also a number of clients designed for easy use. Mac users are particularly fond of Twitterrific (*http://iconfactory.com/software/twitterrific*). Twitbin (installed on all the MMLL computers) is a cross-platform extension to the Firefox browser. You can also Twitter through Skype (*http://www.pacificit.ca/article/319*). More clients are listed here (*http://www.twitterhacks.com/twitter-clients/*).

Twitter Streams and Cultural Immersion

There are a number of twitter streams from the world-wide press as well as a number of twitterers in languages other than English. There are even some Twitter "clones" in other languages. Be aware, however, that some of the clones do not allow for protected updates (privacy).

Twitter Clones:

http://twitter.pbwiki.com/Clones (a partial list)

Sample Twitter Streams in French:
/benews_fr
/rtlinfo
/lci
/LeMondeWorld
/LeMondeMedia
/fr

Sample Twitter Streams in Spanish:
/tuitiar (Twitter community in Argentina)
/el_pais (news from Spain)
/El_Mundo (news from Spain)
/ElChicle (Gossip about celebrities)
/elcomercio (news from Peru)
/marcadiario (sports from Spain)
/Dreamito (délas on hotels, trips, and flights)

Twitter Streams in the Classroom

The easiest way to use Twitter in the classroom is to establish a Twitter account for the class that follows all the students.

Sample activities:

- Ask students to send tweets about their activities in the target language.

- Have students tweet one-sentence summaries of readings, new vocabulary words, questions about what they're studying, etc.

To display a twitter stream in class, log into the class account on the Web. Another possibility is to use TwitterCamp (*http://www.danieldura.com/code/twittercamp/*) , a free download. Unfortunately, it does not yet display foreign character sets properly, although Twitter itself does.

Note: Twitter is not yet the most reliable application. Patience is sometimes required.