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Handheld Translators

Are pocket-size dictionaries a thing of the past? See how two of the latest handheld translators stack up.

From September 2006

By Bridget Moriarity

To test the French, German, and Italian skills of the Voyager II Talking Translator from Lingo and the Ectaco Partner EW800, T+L enlisted a trio of in-house language experts—assistant editor Darrell Hartman and associate editors Clark Mitchell and Clara Ogden. We sent our team on the road to try the devices under real-world conditions—while eating out, shopping, and in a hotel. Although no serious mishaps ensued, they also tested the Health and Emergency sections of the translators.

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Lingo Voyager II

\$199.95; www.lingotravel.com

Basics 12 languages, 240,000 words, and 27,600 phrases

Features Built-in voice recorder, phone book, and six games; speaks words and phrases.

AT A RESTAURANT Basic requests like "Could I have a menu?" are filed in the Meals category, under subheads such as Order and Payment. Nationalities make up the additional subheads; there's also a bizarrely detailed breakdown of Chinese food. On the other hand, there are no entries for German cuisine. And foodies will be disappointed by the dictionary: *lettuce* is listed, but *arugula* is not. **AT A SHOP** We were impressed by the range of phrases in this category—in particular the Bargaining subgroup, with expressions tailor-made for flea-market negotiations. **AT A HOTEL** The first phrase we stumbled across in this section was "More hanger, please," which left us a little disheartened. But we were reassured to see that we could make a variety of practical demands, whether for a quieter room or a safe-deposit box. **IN AN EMERGENCY** In this category, you'll find topics ranging from theft to sudden illness. If time is of the essence, you may be frustrated by the fact that to get to a particular phrase, you have to scroll through every one—and they're listed in no apparent order—that comes before it. **OVERALL** While not as comprehensive as the Ectaco, the Voyager II won us over on three points: its navigability, its ability to translate from one foreign language to another, and its recording function for audio playback. However, its speech function—words were delivered either too fast or too slow in a stodgy male monotone—proved its downfall.