

Lingo's Voyager 2

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 Enlarge By H. Darr Beiser, USA TODAY

Lingo's Voyager 2.

GADGETS DO THE TALKING

- E-translation devices talk for visitors

RATING THE DEVICES

- BBK's AM99
- Goldic's MD8500
- Ectaco's SpeechGuard TL-4
- Lingo's Voyager 2

Resembling a BlackBerry, it is the easiest among the products reviewed to use right away without reading the manual word for word.

Its functions are divided into 12 major categories. To find out how to ask someone to take a picture, for example, simply press the "Phrases" key. Then select "Sightseeing," one of 14 subcategories of phrases. The "Sightseeing" category will reveal another layer of categories, including "Photography."

When the chosen phrase comes up on the screen, press one of 10 buttons — each representing a different language — to hear the correct pronunciation in that language. In addition to Chinese, the device also translates English into German, French, Spanish, Italian, Greek, Russian, Japanese, Korean, Arabic and Hebrew.

Because the voice is computer-generated, it sounds robotic and nasal. We had to press the pronunciation key several times before understanding what it was saying. It also has "only" 20,000 words, plenty for most travelers but not as many as other products.

Another drawback is that it pronounces Chinese words one syllable (or one written character) at a time. This can lead to halting and difficult-to-understand pronunciation of words. For example, the word "waiter" in Chinese consists of three characters. (Imagine an English speaker saying the word "waiter" as "wai, ter.")

Other dictionaries we tested had similar problems, due to the difficulty of prerecording countless Chinese words and character combinations. Common travel phrases, as opposed to the individual words, are easier to understand, as they were pre-recorded in a human voice.

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website: LingoTranslators.com.

No. of languages from English: 11.

No. of English words: 20,000 (2,300 phrases).

Sentence translation: No.

Size: 6 inches by 3.25 inches by 0.5 inches.

Price: \$200.

Useful features: Organizer, currency and metric converter; local/alarm clock.

Comments: Phrases translated into 11 languages.

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