

## What the Phraselator Says

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There is a pervasive misconception in our society that technology can do just about anything. Although well-applied technology is useful and at times astounding, poorly applied technology more often than not is costly, wasteful and frustrating. Such is the case with the Phraselator and other devices mentioned in the Nov. 1 Business article "First Ears, Then Hearts and Minds; Facing Shortage of Arabic Interpreters, Pentagon Seeks a Technological Solution."

Language is perhaps the most human of all human expressions. It is a manifestation of our thoughts, desires and emotions. The notion that a synthesized voice from a small electronic device saying in Arabic "We're here to search your house. Please stay in this room. Do you have any weapons?" could calm or reassure a frightened Iraqi is absurd.

The interpretive devices and so many other projects like them are misguided attempts to use technology to solve a problem that requires a human solution: linguists who understand both languages and cultures.

Rather than spending \$20.8 million this year on "translation technologies," the Pentagon's money would be better spent on training qualified people to work as interpreters and help our troops do their jobs.

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