

Shut up and listen

Your dog will be talking with the Bow-Lingual Dog Translator in stores now

By Amelia Williamson
THE BATTALION

People have often wondered what a dog would say if it could talk. This question may be answered with the introduction of the Bow-Lingual Dog Translator, a device that claims to translate dogs' barks. Bow-Lingual sells for \$119 at PETSMART with catchy slogans such as, "Giving dogs a voice they never had" and "Your dog has something to tell you."

The translator appeals to the immense curiosity people have about what dogs are thinking and feeling and what they mean when they bark.

"I think that (Bow-Lingual) sounds neat," said freshman education major Katherine Etchison. "I would love to know how my dog is feeling when she barks."

Shoppers may wonder how the gadget works and if it really is accurate.

Matsumi Suzuki, president of the Japan Acoustic Laboratory, was the main researcher in the development of Bow-Lingual. He recorded samples of dog barks and, while analyzing them, found that there were distinct acoustic patterns in the barks, according to the Bow-Lingual Web site, www.takara-usa.com. Using this as his starting point, Suzuki expanded his sampling of dog barks, recording thousands of bark samples from more

than 80 breeds of dogs using digital sound recorders and video recorders.

Dr. Norio Kogure, an animal behaviorist, veterinarian and the president of Kogure Companion Animal Clinic in Tokyo, Japan, helped to classify the dog bark samples into basic emotional categories. He studied the video and audio samples of the dog barks and, by examining the different barks and the behavior of the dogs while barking, he came up with six emotional categories: happy, sad, on-guard, frustrated, assertive and needy. Some of the barks did not fall specifically into one of these six categories, but by looking at the categories the bark resembled and the behavior of the dog, Kogure fit each bark into one of the six categories.

Once the foundation of emotional categories was established, Suzuki converted the samples of dog barks into digital voiceprints, using a Fast Fourier Transform (FFT) analyzer, which breaks a sound into its frequency components. He then classified each voiceprint as showing one of the six basic emotions, taking the breed of the dog into consideration, as indicated on the Bow-Lingual Web site.

Suzuki created a system called the Animal Emotion Analysis System (AEAS) that converts any dog bark into a voiceprint and identifies the emotion that the voiceprint most closely matches. He took into account the fact that not all breeds of dogs are pure and that the size of a dog and the length of a dog's snout affect the acoustic characteristics of that dog's bark. So he created acoustic profiles for six generic types of dogs: large, medium or small dogs with either long or short snouts. When Suzuki applied barks from the generic types of dogs to the AEAS, the results were not as accurate as they were for the pure breeds, but still seemed to classify the bark into the correct emotion category most of the time, according to the Bow-Lingual Web site.

Suzuki recognized that the voiceprint of a dog's bark changes as the dog ages. A dog's voice changes often when it is a puppy, so the results are

not as accurate for young dogs as they are for adult dogs.

According to the Bow-Lingual Web site, product designers from the Takara Corporation, a Japanese company, worked with Suzuki to create a wireless microphone that fits on a dog's collar and a handheld unit, containing a receiver, FFT analyzer, microcomputer, simple keyboard and a liquid crystal display interface, to translate the barks. The device was tested and adjusted until it was as accurate as the equipment Suzuki used in his laboratory.

Takara's designers consulted with Kogure to determine which phrases could be used to correspond with the six different emotions. Takara came up with more than 200 translation phrases to correspond with the emotions.

The Bow-Lingual handheld device picks up bark transmissions from the microphone on the dog's collar from up to 30 feet away and displays the matching emotion and a phrase that fits with the emotion.

The Bow-Lingual Dog Translator also has a body language mode that allows a person to choose the type of body language he wants to know about: ears, eyes, mouth, behavior, fur and tail. It then displays different actions associated with the type of body language and what the action means in terms of what the dog is thinking when it displays certain body language.

An additional feature of the dog translator is the home alone mode that records a dog's barks and emotions for up to 12 hours while its owner is away. The Bow-Lingual Web site explains that this feature allows a person to know how his dog was feeling while they were away.

Some people are skeptical about a device that claims to translate a dog's barks and question its accuracy.

"Barking is one form of vocal communication (in dogs) but is limited primarily to general messages that denote such things as excitement, not specific messages such as occur in human

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— Katherine Etchison
freshman education major



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See Bow-Lingual on page 2

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