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Plaintalk 1.4: Questions and Answers (8/95)

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TOPIC -----

This article describes the new features and improvements of Plaintalk 1.4.

DISCUSSION -----

PlainTalk is a collection of software that enables your Macintosh to speak written text and respond to spoken commands. PlainTalk 1.4 includes three components, each with its own installer: English Text-to-Speech, Mexican Spanish Text-to-Speech, and English Speech Recognition.

This document describes each of these three software packages, and discusses the differences between PlainTalk 1.3 and PlainTalk 1.4.

English Text-to-Speech

With the English text-to-speech software installed, many Macintosh programs can read English text out loud. To install the English Text-to-Speech software, you need the following software and hardware:

- any Macintosh or Power Macintosh computer
- version 6.0.7 or later of system software
- at least 300 kilobytes (K) of RAM in addition to what the rest of your system software requires
- at least 5 megabytes (MB) of space available on your hard disk

For more information about the English Text-to-Speech software, see the Using English Text-to-Speech document or the About English Text-to-Speech document in the English Text-to-Speech folder.

Mexican Spanish Text-to-Speech

With the Mexican Spanish text-to-speech software installed, many Macintosh programs can read Spanish text out loud. To install the Mexican Spanish text-to-speech software, you need the following hardware and software:

- a Power Macintosh computer or a Macintosh computer with a 68020, 68030, or

68040 processor

- version 7.0 or later of system software
- at least 1.3 MB of RAM in addition to what the rest of your system software requires
- at least 2 MB of space available on your hard disk

For more information about the Mexican Spanish Text-to-Speech software, see the Using Mexican Spanish TTS document in the Mexican Spanish Text-to-Speech folder.

English Speech Recognition

With the English Speech Recognition package and the proper hardware, your computer can respond to spoken commands. The English Speech Recognition package includes the Speech Recognition system extension, the Speech control panel, and a utility called Speakable Items. With Speakable Items, whenever you say the name of an item inside the Speakable Items folder (which is inside the Apple Menu Items folder), the computer acts as if you double-clicked the item.

You can turn Speakable Items on and off using the Speech control panel. You can also use the Speech control panel to set several preferences for how Macintosh Speech Recognition programs listen and respond. For example, you can set the Listening options in the Speech control panel so that the recognizer only listens while you hold down a key of your choice. When you use this option recognition accuracy is improved and misfires (when the computer thinks you spoke a command but you didn't) are eliminated.

To install and use the English Speech Recognition software, including the Speakable Items software, you need the following hardware and software:

- a Power Macintosh computer
- system software version 7.5 or later
- a 16-bit microphone, such as the Apple PlainTalk Microphone or the microphone built into some Apple audiovisual displays (Note: this version of PlainTalk does not work very well with the microphone built into some AudioVision 14 displays.)

For more information about the English Speech Recognition software and the Speakable Items utility, see the Using Speech Recognition document in the English Speech Recognition folder.

Differences between PlainTalk 1.4 and PlainTalk 1.3

Earlier versions of the PlainTalk software had a single installer program that installed both text-to-speech and speech recognition. This version (1.4) contains three different installers to make it easier to install just the parts that are appropriate for your needs: English Text-to-Speech, Mexican Spanish Text-to-Speech, and English Speech Recognition. It doesn't matter what order you install them in, and you don't have to install them all. However, if you install version 1.4 of English Speech Recognition or Mexican Spanish Text-to-Speech then you should also install version 1.4 of English

Text-to-Speech instead of using an older version of English Text-to-Speech.

Deciding whether to upgrade to version 1.4

In general, version 1.4 offers a more robust and flexible set of features than earlier versions. However, some people in special circumstances may do better with version 1.3.

- If you have a Macintosh AV computer that has a 68040 processor and you use PlainTalk 1.3's speech recognition capabilities, Apple recommends that you continue using version 1.3 of the PlainTalk software. Though the new text-to-speech software works with these computers, the new speech recognition software does not (because it runs on Power Macintosh computers only). It is not recommended that you mix versions, using the old recognition software with the new text-to-speech software. (Note: all the new software works with Power Macintosh AV computers.)

- If you have an Apple AudioVision 14 display, Apple recommends that you keep using version 1.3, unless you have an Apple PlainTalk microphone. Version 1.4 of the speech recognition software does not work well with the microphone built into some AudioVision 14 displays.

- If you make extensive use of PlainTalk 1.3's Speech Macros, the Speech Macro Editor, or the ability to speak menu commands, then you might want to continue using version 1.3. As part of the effort to make the software more robust, version 1.4 of English Speech Recognition supports Apple's standard AppleScript ScriptEditor instead of the Speech Macro Editor, and it does not support the ability to speak menu items. This is discussed more below.

What's new in English Text-to-Speech

English text-to-speech software version 1.4 is very similar to earlier versions. The main differences are:

- English Text-to-Speech 1.4 has its own installer.
- English Text-to-Speech 1.4 includes a Speech control panel that lets you select a system-wide default voice and rate, which is used by many text-to-speech programs, including SimpleText and the Speakable Items utility.

What's new in Mexican Spanish Text-to-Speech

PlainTalk 1.4 is the first version of PlainTalk to include support for Mexican Spanish text-to-speech.

What's new in English Speech Recognition

English Speech Recognition version 1.4 has some significant differences from the speech recognition software in earlier versions of PlainTalk. Some features have been eliminated to simplify speech recognition and make it more robust and usable. Other options have been added to increase accuracy and eliminate misfires.

- Version 1.4 offers a new listening option in the Speech control panel, "Listen only while key(s) are pressed," that lets you leave Speakable Items on all the time without worrying about misfires. It also improves the accuracy of recognition.
- Version 1.4 works in a wider range of environments thanks to its greatly improved adaptation to room acoustics.
- Version 1.4 does not include or support Speech Macros, the Speech Macro Editor, or Speech Rules. It still supports speaking dialog buttons and the Speakable Items folder. Any item you place inside the folder becomes speakable—saying the name of the item launches or opens the item. You can use the AppleScript ScriptEditor to create scripts that are launched by speaking a command: just save the scripts inside the Speakable Items folder. To see examples, look inside the Speakable Items folder.
- Version 1.4 runs on Power Macintosh computers only, and does not support Macintosh AV computers with 68040 processors. You can continue to use PlainTalk 1.3 on 68040 Macintosh AV computers.
- Version 1.4 does not include automatic support for recognizing the spoken names of menu commands. You can still manipulate scriptable programs, such as the Finder, using AppleScript commands. To see examples, look inside the Speakable Items folder.

Known bugs and workarounds in PlainTalk 1.4

This section describes a few bugs found at the last minute in PlainTalk 1.4, along with workarounds where possible. More troubleshooting information can be found in the documents in the three installer folders.

Apple AudioVision 14 displays. Version 1.4 of English Speech Recognition does not work well with the microphones built into some Apple AudioVision 14 displays. If you have problems using speech recognition with the microphone built into this display, you can use the Apple PlainTalk Microphone (part # M9060Z/A) or you can go back to using PlainTalk 1.3. To go back to version 1.3, use the 1.4 installers to deinstall the new version, then use your old 1.3 installers to reinstall version 1.3.

Mixing Text-to-Speech 1.4 with Speech Recognition 1.3. Apple does not recommend using version 1.4 of text-to-speech with version 1.3 of speech recognition. The PlainTalk 1.4 speech recognition options are visible in the Speech control panel but do not work with the PlainTalk 1.3 speech recognition software. If you do mix them, remember to use the correct control panel for your task: to configure speech recognition version 1.3, use the Speech Setup control panel; to configure text-to-speech version 1.4, use the Voice option of the Speech control panel. You should ignore all the other options of the Speech control panel.

Wrong name in the Using English Speech Recognition document file. In the Using English Speech Recognition document, the phrase "Speakable Items control panel" is sometimes used where what is meant is "Speech control panel."

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