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General Description

TaLk to Me is a relatively recently designed foreign language learning tool based on actual ***spoken*** dialogue between you the user and the computer.

The most advanced voice processing technology has made such a teaching method possible.

TaLk to Me's main objective is to allow you to improve your oral command of a given language. After practising several phrases, **TaLk to Me** analyses your voice, evaluates your pronunciation and helps you to progress.

But that's not all. Once you have mastered these phrases, you can integrate them into meaningful **TaLk to Me** dialogues. As you will discover, these are all 'real situation' exchanges, e.g. *at the airport, bank, Post Office, etc.*

There is no risk of repetitiveness, since you can choose different replies at each dialogue level; you can practise several dozen variations on each situation.

TaLk to Me package

TaLk to Me comprises these components:
- One CD-ROM;
- This user manual.

The CD carries the software, installation instructions and lessons (*text, sound, vocabulary, images, etc*.) and corresponds to an individual language, level and series of topics.

Sound card

TaLk to Me requires a sound card to run.

Depending on your computer, a sound card may already be installed on the motherboard or come separately. If this is the case you will have to insert it into the relevant expansion slot. Generally, however, most multimedia computers come with the sound card already installed.

TaLk to Me is compatible with all 16 bit Windows driven sound cards.

The sound card may have to be installed. This is done by loading the sound drivers onto the hard drive and reconfiguring Windows accordingly.

As a general rule, follow carefully the instructions given in the sound card installation manual.

If voice recognition is poor and scores consistently low, this is a result either of using a poor quality microphone, or of plugging it in incorrectly, or there may be a loose contact. Use Windows 3.1 Sound Recorder or Windows 95 Recorder tools to record your voice and listen to it. If the microphone is not correctly plugged in, either the recording will be distorted or there will be no input signal at all.

Microphone

Plug the microphone jack into the appropriate socket of the sound card. There are generally four to choose from:

- Microphone in.
- Line in.
- Headphones/speakers out.
- Line out.

Be sure to plug the jack into the correct socket.

Headphones or Speakers

Repeat the same operation as for the microphone.

The type of speaker you use (with or without amplifier) will determine wether you should plug it to speakers out or line out. See your booklet for more information.

Plug the headphone/speaker jack into the appropriate socket, i.e. 'headphones/speakers out'.

Poor sound reproduction may be caused by using poor headphones/speakers, or because the jack is incorrectly plugged in, or because of a loose contact.

Windows

Windows must be properly installed and configured if **TaLk to Me** is to run correctly. The essential requirements are SVGA mode, sound card and sufficient memory.

See also:

Graphics card and SVGA screen

Sound card

Memory

Graphics card and SVGA screen

To operate at its best, **TaLk to Me** needs a true colour display (65536 colours). However, an 800x600 or 1024x768 resolution display with at least 256 colours allows proper functioning. If your Windows configuration is set for a 16 colour display (EGA/VGA mode), the photographic images accompanying the dialogue situations will not be satisfactorily displayed. This message will appear on the screen.
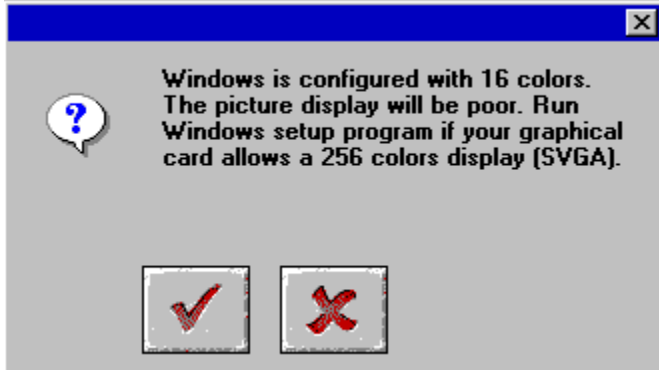
If Windows is configured for a 640x480 resolution or less, **TaLk to Me** will be less visually satisfactory. The following message will appear:
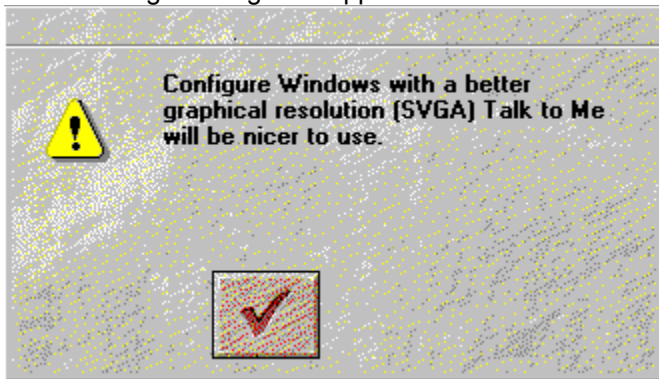
If one of the preceding messages appears on the screen, and if your graphics card has at least 512 Kb of memory, you can change the settings to improve display. To do so, see the user manual supplied with your graphics card or follow these instructions, depending on your Windows version.
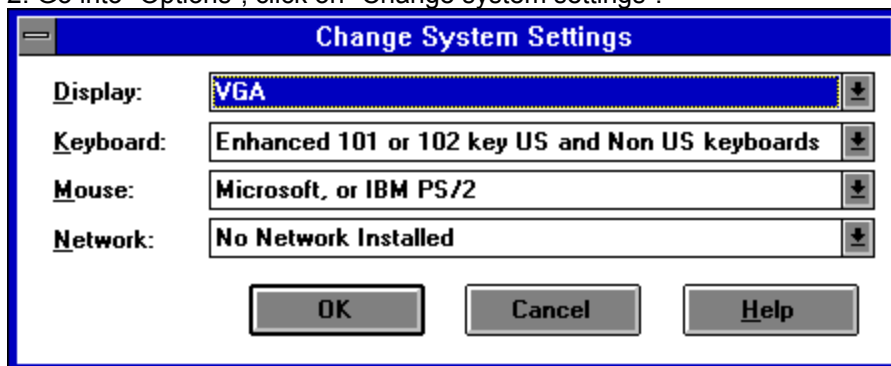
See also:

Step-by-step instructions for Windows 3.1

Step-by-step instructions for Windows 95
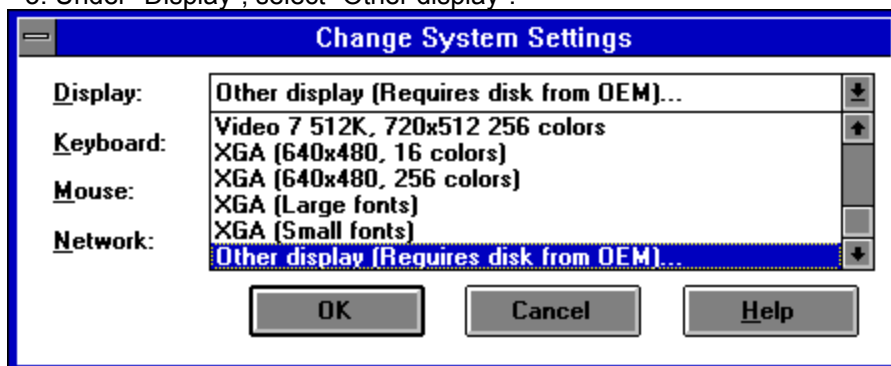
Step-by-step instructions for Windows 3.1

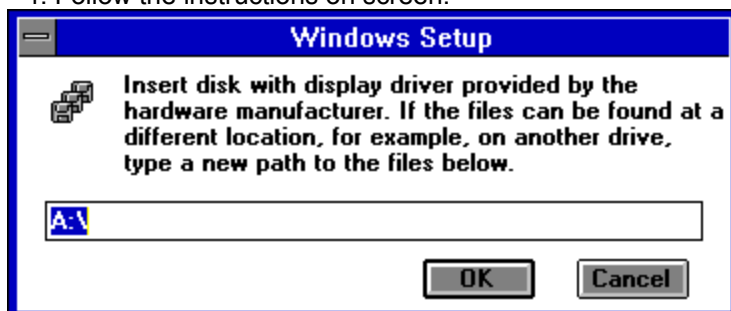1. Go into Windows Setup. This can usually be done from the "Main" group in Program Manager.

Windows Setup

Options   Help

Display:	VGA
Keyboard:	Enhanced 101 or 102 key US and Non US
Mouse:	Microsoft, or IBM PS/2
Network:	No Network Installed
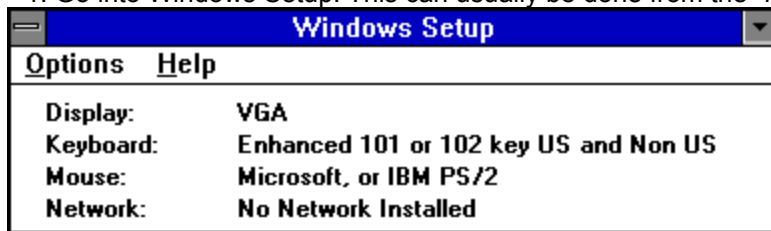
2. Go into "Options", click on "Change system settings".

Change System Settings

Display:	VGA
Keyboard:	Enhanced 101 or 102 key US and Non US keyboards
Mouse:	Microsoft, or IBM PS/2
Network:	No Network Installed

OK   Cancel   Help

3. Under "Display", select "Other display".

Change System Settings

Display: Other display (Requires disk from OEM)...

Keyboard:
Mouse:
Network:

Video 7 512K, 720x512 256 colors
XGA (640x480, 16 colors)
XGA (640x480, 256 colors)
XGA (Large fonts)
XGA (Small fonts)
Other display (Requires disk from OEM)...

OK   Cancel   Help

4. Follow the instructions on screen.

Windows Setup

Insert disk with display driver provided by the hardware manufacturer. If the files can be found at a different location, for example, on another drive, type a new path to the files below.

A:\

OK   Cancel

Step-by-step instructions for Windows 95

1/ When the screen is clear, click on the mouse right button.

2/ Select *Properties* in the context-sensitive menu.

3/ In *Properties for display*, click on *Settings*.

4/ In *Desktop*, set a number of pixels (640x480; 800x600; 1024x768) and in *Colors*, set a number of colors (16; 256; 65536,...).

Sound card

Any 16 bit Windows compatible sound card may be used.

However, the card must be correctly installed if Windows - and thus **TaLk to Me** - is to run properly. Sound cards usually come with one or two installation diskettes which carry the necessary files that allow Windows to use the card. See also your sound card user manual and Windows documentation.

Once installation is complete, use the standard *"Sound Recorder"* tool to test that your sound card is running properly under Windows.

Connect up the microphone and the headphones/speakers, record your voice and listen to the result. If your voice is clear, the sound card has been correctly installed. If it is not, consult your sound card documentation for advice.

Memory

TaLk to Me needs at least 8Mb memory to run. If you only have 4Mb available, it is advisable to close other applications, reduce the number of resident programs and avoid using disk cache when you wish to run **TaLk to Me**.

If, however, you do have at least 8Mb available, then it is preferable to use at least 1Mb of cache memory (e.g. *using SmartDrive if you have MS-DOS 5.0 or a later version*).

Windows documentation

To ensure that you are correctly using all Windows resources, consult your Windows manual.

Installing TaLk to Me

With Windows 95

Insert the **TaLk to Me** CD into your CD-ROM drive. Installation will start automatically a few seconds later.

With Windows 3.1

Insert the **TaLk to Me** CD into your CD-ROM drive.

From Program Manager, click on the *"Run"* option located in the *"File"* menu. Type D:\ (or any letter representing your CD-ROM drive) then SETUP.

Enter or click on '*OK*' to run the set-up program.

The installation program will first ask you on which directory you wish to install **TaLk to Me** (TALKTOME is the default directory).

It will then ask you to indicate the path to access your CD-ROM drive where data will be stored. Also, it will ask you to set the minimum acceptance level required.

If you set this at 1, **TaLk to Me** will accept virtually all your responses even if they are very badly pronounced or make no sense.

If you wish to work at a more demanding level, simply select a higher level. You can also change the level from within the TALKTOME.INI file (see section TALKTOME.INI).

To install **TaLk to Me**, you will need 8Mb available memory on your hard drive.

TALKTOME.INI

During installation, **TaLk to Me** copies the TALKTOME.INI file into the Windows directory.

This file contains **TaLk to Me's** operating parameters - *user language, minimum acceptance level etc.* - and these are set on installation.

TALKTOME.INI is a standard text file, so its settings may be edited at any time.

Running TaLk to Me

To run **TaLk to Me**, either click on the corresponding icon or run the program (TALKTOME.EXE).

Uninstalling TaLk to Me

To uninstall **TaLk to Me** from the hard drive, click on the corresponding icon to   run the program (UNINSTALL).

Basic instructions

Once you have installed **TaLk to Me,** you will no doubt be eager to start your "trip abroad".

To ensure that you get the best from our product, follow these basic guidelines:

Get comfortable

If you have headphones, make sure you are wearing them correctly and comfortably.

Adjust the microphone; ideally you should keep it two centimetres from your mouth and *slightly to one side* to avoid breathing directly into it.

Speak only when indicated

You will communicate mainly verbally with the computer; speak only when an answer is expected.

If you have chosen the 'text' option for the "Waiting for an answer" setting (see Chapter Options), the following message will appear at the bottom of the screen:

Speak...

If you have chosen the "animation" option, the following images will appear:
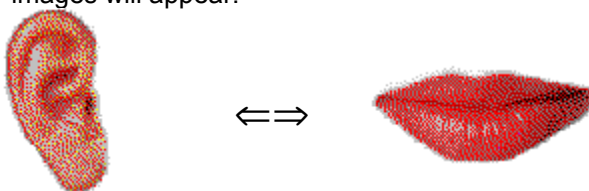
Now it is your turn to speak; here again there are some basic rules to follow. Getting used to them from the outset will make your dialogue with the computer a great deal more natural:

Once you are accustomed to the computer, you will converse with it as naturally as you would with another human being.

- Speak after the beep (if this option has been activated);

- Do not speak to anyone else whilst you are speaking to the computer;

- Try to work alone in a quiet environment; if this is not possible, use a suitably adapted microphone (see section Microphone);

- Take your time and speak clearly, trying to avoid hesitations; Remember to speak loudly enough;

- Always choose your answer from those shown on screen;

- For longer sentences, speak sufficiently fast - remember that your answer can only be 4 seconds long.

And finally, relax and be natural. Try to imitate the model version as closely as possible so that you acquire the correct cadence, stress and pronunciation for each sentence.

Tips

- The acceptance level settings may be altered at any time. If you are a complete beginner, fix the acceptance level at 1. Practically all of your replies will be accepted by the computer, however badly pronounced.

NB : Try to increase the acceptance level quickly so as to avoid picking up poor pronunciation habits!

- When practising your pronunciation, try to imitate the model version as closely as possible; the closer you get, the higher your score.

- Try to vary the way you speak even if it sounds artificial to you; you will soon pick up the highest scoring pronunciation.

- You can concentrate on part of a word or sentence during playback; this enables you to hone your version accordingly and pinpoint any problem areas.

Microphone

The microphone is an essential piece of voice recognition equipment.

A poor quality microphone will distort your voice so that **TaLk to Me** will be unable to recognize you; your score will be consistently low as a result.

It is advisable to use unidirectional microphones (such as the SHURE SM10A) in noisy environments (large rooms, exhibitions, language laboratories etc.). They cut down on a lot of unwanted background noise (other people talking etc.) so that several students may work at the same time without disturbing each other.

Ordinary microphones are not adapted in this way and so are only suited for use in quiet environments where only the student's voice will be picked up by the computer.

Headphones or Speakers

The choice of headphones or speakers depends on the environment where you are working.

Headphones

Headphones allow you to work without disturbing those around you and are most frequently used in language laboratories, multimedia resource centres, shared offices etc.

Speakers

Speakers can be used where you are unlikely to disturb anyone else (e.g. at home, in a closed room). They are the most convenient method for **TaLk to Me** learning.

The manufacturer's technical specifications for speakers or headphones will be clearly indicated; your sound card will indicate the most suitable type of speakers/headphones to use. Ensure that they are mutually compatible.

Languages

TaLk to Me has already many lessons available in English, Spanish, French and German. Other languages and lessons will follow.

Note the distinction between:

- The language that the student uses to control the software.

- The language being taught, as indicated in the CD.

  Some languages are available in two versions (i.e. British/American English). The difference is important as far as voice recognition and pronunciation evaluation are concerned.

Topics

Each lesson covers a topic as described in the dialogue situation.

Methodology

TaLk to Me is a diverse teaching medium; it can be used as a supplement to class-based learning, as a home-learning tool, or to improve pronunciation etc.

Below is an example of a suitable lesson plan:

I- Choose a lesson

Choose the lesson you wish to study.

II - Easy dialogue

Set the acceptance level to the lowest level; in this way the computer will have little difficulty accepting your input. You will be able to hold simple conversations about and familiarise yourself with the topic being studied without too much of a struggle.

III - Harder dialogue

Set "*acceptance level*" at a more demanding level and start the dialogue again. The computer will now reject any poorly pronounced sentences.

When this happens, you can make use of the pronunciation exercise to improve your performance.

IV - Pronunciation, imitation

This exercise involves listening to the model version of a sentence and then repeating it. Each attempt is given a score so that you can check your progress.

In most cases, close imitation of what you hear will improve your pronunciation after a few attempts, then you can return to the dialogue.

You may at times wish to concentrate more closely on pronunciation. There are a number of ways of doing this.

V - Pronunciation, consolidation

For further practice, using graphic tools, repeat listening, splitting the phrases into sections and noting your score may help.

Chapter <u>Teaching method</u> gives details of how to use these tools.

VI - Returning to the dialogue

You can return to the dialogue once any pronunciation problems have been ironed out. Should more arise, simply use the exercises available.

VII - Dialogue, difficult level

You can increase the difficulty of the dialogue:

• By setting the acceptance level to a higher level so that **TaLk to Me** only accepts good or excellent pronunciation. In the exercise, you must try to obtain the maximum score which means that your imitation must be very accurate.

• By altering the settings (see Chapter <u>Options</u>) so that the dialogue text is no longer displayed on

screen and you thus improve your oral comprehension skills.

- By altering the settings so that the range of possible responses are not displayed and you must work from memory; this improves your internalisation of the dialogue.

By making use of all the available replies in turn so that you cover all the possibilities that the dialogue situation offers.

Improving your pronunciation

You have selected a sentence and you want to improve your pronunciation. It is of course possible to leap from an initial score of 1 to the maximum of 7, but it might be less disheartening to aim for a more modest increase in your average score, from 2 to 3 for example. This denotes good progress.

What pronunciation improvement means does **TaLk to Me** offer?

I - Imitation

This is the principle on which **TaLk to Me** is based.

An infant learns to speak by listening to and repeating what it hears. At around 12 months, when it begins to talk, its first words are often, unsurprisingly, "mum" and "dad", and parents will repeat these words to their child in the hope that he/she will, in turn, repeat them. The first attempts may be a little shaky ("mama", "dada"), but repetition results in rapid improvement. All basic vocabulary is acquired in this way.

By the time the child is 2/3 years old, he/she will have acquired an impressive catalogue of words and expressions. As parents correct their child's pronunciation of simple words, so it improves until finally perfect. More difficult words are mastered as time progresses.

The foreign language learner is in a similar situation, only with a 'native speaker' taking on the role of the parent. This native speaker (i.e. a teacher, a BBC commentator, the au pair, anyone met casually whilst visiting the country whose language is being learnt) is the model the student tries to imitate.

TaLk to Me recreates this learning environment by establishing model sentences to which you listen, then repeat.

Simply imitating a sound will improve your pronunciation.

II - Score

TaLk to Me awards you a score based on the shortfall between your attempt and the model version.

You can improve your pronunciation by repeating a sentence (varying intonation, stress, rhythm) until your score improves. This indicates that you are getting closer to the model version.

III - Graphic representation

Each phrase is represented graphically as a measurement of voice intensity over time.

The top image represents the model version, the lower one your own.

It is thus possible to <u>see</u> your voice:

"Ces falaises sont vraiment abruptes!"
The sentence can then be broken down and each sound represented graphically:

- "Ces" (these) is shown by the first block on the line. It is the first sound the computer picks up.

- "falaises" (cliffs) is shown by the second block. The slight pause between the "fa" and "laises" syllables is clearly shown.

- "sont" (are) is the third block. It is much smaller than the others, as the "s" sound is weak, especially when followed as it is here by the "ont" sound.

- "vraiment" (really) is shown by the fourth block. The link between the two syllables "vrai" and "ment" is evident.

- "abruptes" (steep) is shown by the three small blocks at the end. The slight pause between "a" and "brup" and the longer one between "brup" and "tes" are clearly visible.

Comparing the two images will highlight where the problems lie.

IV - Repeat listening

As all your attempts are stored on the hard drive, you can go back and listen to your own version as well as the model version.

The principle here is one of 'comparative listening', the method used in conventional language laboratories or with cassette-based learning. Most language learning software relies on the same principle.

Listening, then, is the only way you can detect any differences between your version and the model one.

V- Listening to part of a sentence

You can concentrate on a particular section of a sentence by using the mouse to highlight it - move the cursor to the beginning of the desired section, click the mouse button and hold it down whilst moving the cursor to the end of the section.


```
   Ces   fa laises sont  vrai  ment  a brup    tes!
```

Comparing your model with that of the model is very straightforward; you can highlight "sont vraiment" and see how the text, sound and image are related.

Approach

Your aim is to pick out where your version differs from the model, here are the steps to follow:

- Check the image to see where the differences lie.

- Highlight one of the problem areas and listen to it again. Try to hear where you are going wrong.

- Concentrate on this area and attempt several pronunciations. Say the rest of the sentence normally as before. If your score goes up by one point, you have made a significant improvement.

- Highlight another area of the sentence which you found difficult, and repeat third step until satisfied.
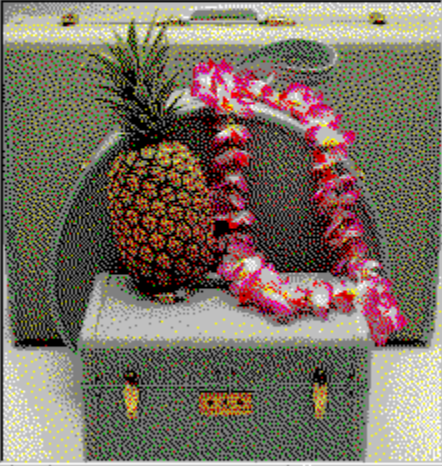
Start up

Simply select the *"Lesson"* option from the main menu.
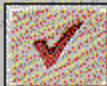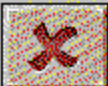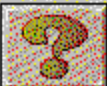
TaLk to Me will then display all available lessons. Click on the required area.

Selecting *"first image"* , the first image of the lesson chosen will be displayed.

On slower computers, displaying this image will slow down the speed of the selection bar.

Click on **Cancel** if you wish to quit the lesson.

Click on the **OK** button to choose the lesson highlighted.

Startup

To start the dialogue:

- choose the *"Dialogue"* option from the main menu,

or
- click on the corresponding icon.

NB ! You cannot start the dialogue unless a lesson has been selected.

You can start the dialogue:

- from the beginning,
- from any part of it,
- from a particular question.

NB ! the number of the question you are working on is permanently displayed at the top right hand corner of the window.

If you wish to select a part of the dialogue, select the appropriate number.

If you wish to start from a specific question, do likewise.

Off you go!

General principles

TaLk to Me simulates real-life/professional situations via dialogue between you and the computer.

The computer displays a relevant photograph of the situation, asks a question and offers you the choice of a number of possible responses, one of which you select.

TaLk to Me displays your answer in green text, and may also display any necessary messages. The dialogue is modelled according to the replies you choose.

Within the dialogue you will find:

- *Question:* the question is displayed at the top right hand side of the screen while you listen to the model version.
- *Image:* some questions have an accompanying photograph of the situation, which is displayed to the left of the dialogue text.
- *Student answer:* the student replies after listening to the question. Suitable replies are displayed at the bottom right hand side of the screen.
- *Computer messages:* once the computer has recognized the student's answer, **TaLk to Me** may display a message to indicate this, which will be displayed at the top right hand side of the screen.
- *Dialogue development:* once the student has responded and any messages have been displayed,

the dialogue will move onto the next question. The way in which the dialogue proceeds depends on how the student responds; many different directions are possible.

Replying

Here are some basic instructions which will help you reply in the correct manner:

- *Wait until after the beep:* **TaLk to Me** will not accept your answer if you speak too soon.

- *Avoid pauses while replying:* **TaLk to Me** will automatically assume that you have finished speaking and will attempt to evaluate your performance.

Depending on the acceptance level you have chosen, you will either get a 'reject' or a 'false recognition' A pause for **TaLk to Me** means a silence of more than 0.5 seconds.

- *Imitate the model version:* as acceptance level increases, your pronunciation must improve if your answer is to be accepted. Use the pronunciation exercise for practise.

- *Limited speaking time:* you will have a maximum of four seconds 'talking time'. For longer replies, you will need to speak reasonably fast or the computer will cut in.

- *Choose your answer from those offered:* if you set the acceptance level at 1, **TaLk to Me** will accept any of the replies available, but if you do not reply from these answers, the computer may not recognize it.

Functions available

You can make use of the following functions during the dialogue; simply click on the relevant button.

- **Moving on to the next question:** you can interrupt the question you are working on and go directly on to the next one.
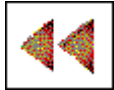
- **Going back to the preceding question:** as before, you can abandon the question you are working on and return to the preceding one.
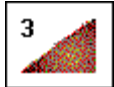
- **Volume control:** use this function to alter the volume; the level will be displayed with the function icon.
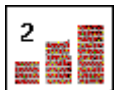
- **Acceptance level:** click on this icon to change the acceptance level. The level you choose is displayed with the icon.
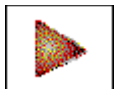
- **Pause :** you may pause either during the model version or before you answer. Click on the button again to resume the lesson.
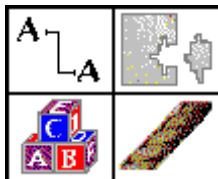
- **Grammar and vocabulary exercises :** you can run the exercises (associations, fill in the blanks, word order, hangman and dictation) with these icons.
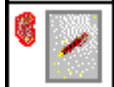
- **Software help:** can be run with this icon.

- **Software information :** this icon provides information about functions accessed with the mouse right button.
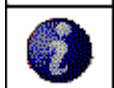
- **Exit :** clicking on this button will close the dialogue and return you to the main **TaLk to Me** menu.
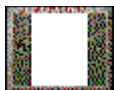
Some functions may not be available, in which case the buttons will not work.

Mouse right button

By clicking on the mouse right button, you can run three different context-sensitive menus, depending on the location of the mouse pointer, when the dialogue mode is on.

🔊 Listen to the sentence
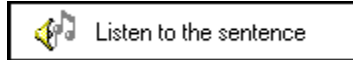
- When the mouse pointer is positioned on a question, you can:
- listen to the recording of the question.

❤ Pronunciation exercise

🔊 Listen to the sentence
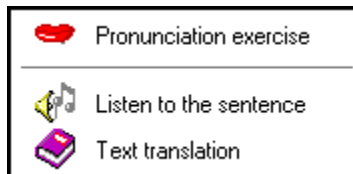
📖 Text translation

- When the mouse pointer is positioned on an answer, you can:
- run the pronunciation exercise;

- listen to the recording of the answer;

- obtain the text translation (if available at the time of purchase).

❤ Pronunciation exercise

📕 Exercises

📚 Lexical help

📖 Translation of all sentences

🚪 Exit
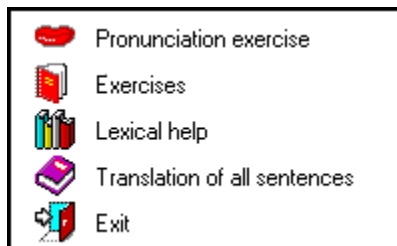
- When the mouse pointer is positioned on another part of the screen, you can:
- run the pronunciation exercise;

- run grammar and vocabular exercises;

- access lexical help (if available at the time of purchase);

- obtain the translation of all sentences (if available at the time of purchase);

- exit.

Modes

There are three different dialogue modes:

- *Playing* the question/computer message.

- *Waiting* for your answer.

- *Pause* if required.

If you have chosen the 'text' option for the "Waiting for an answer" setting (see Chapter Options), the following message will appear at the bottom of the screen:

Speak...

If you have chosen the "animation" option, the following images will appear:
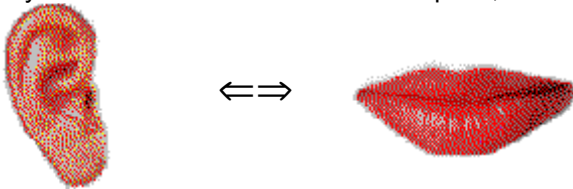
This exercise is designed to give you practice on the sentences you will need for the dialogue you are working on.

You can access them as soon as you hit a problem, i.e. if **TaLk to Me** rejects one of your attempts, or you genuinely cannot pronounce the sentence in question.

Pronunciation exercise

The pronunciation exercise will then play a model version for you to listen to and repeat; try to achieve the highest score possible. Do make use of all the functions available to help you improve your performance (see Chapter <u>Pronunciation exercise</u>).

You can access this exercise by:
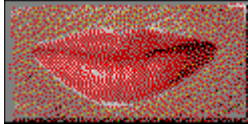
- positioning the mouse on one of the answers, clicking on the mouse right button and selecting 'pronunciation exercise'

- clicking on one of the sentences you are offered.

- positioning the mouse pointer of another part of the screen (except for the question area), clicking on the mouse right button and selecting 'pronunciation exercise'

See section <u>Improving your pronunciation</u> for full details of the pronunciation exercise.

Acceptance level

The acceptance level you choose is an essential part of the exercise, and will render the computer more or less demanding with regard to your replies.

Levels range from 1 to 7.

Decreasing the level will make **TaLk to Me** less demanding, so that more of your responses are accepted.

Increasing the level will make **TaLk to Me** more demanding, so that your responses will only be accepted if your pronunciation is good or excellent.

There is a direct relationship between the acceptance level you choose and the score you obtain in the pronunciation exercise. (N.B. this score is not displayed within the dialogue).

Score *below* the acceptance level ==> rejection, dialogue halted.

Score *above* the acceptance level ==> acceptance, dialogue proceeds.
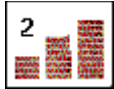
 Click on this button to set the acceptance level before starting the dialogue.

An acceptance level of 1 will mean that virtually all of your responses will be accepted, even if your pronunciation is very poor or what you say makes no sense.

Note: Do not use this function as a way of 'skipping over' difficult areas to get to the next question. If you are experiencing difficulties, use the pronunciation exercise. Do not adjust the acceptance level during the dialogue.

When installing **TaLk to Me** you can fix a minimum acceptance level, which **TaLk to Me** will not allow you to decrease subsequently (that would make things too easy!)

It is located in the TALKTOME.INI file in the Windows directory, and can be altered after installation if required.

Startup

To start the exercise:

- Select *"Pronunciation"* from the main menu,
or
- Click on the corresponding icon.

NB ! This exercise can only be run if a lesson has already been selected.

It can be started from within the dialogue either by clicking on the corresponding icon or on one of the suggested replies.

Choosing a sentence

The pronunciation exercise will ask you to highlight and select the sentence you wish to practise.
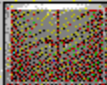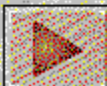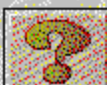
There are three ways to use this exercise:

- You can access the exercise from the dialogue by clicking on any of the suggested replies, so that you can concentrate directly on the sentence you wish to practise.

- You can access the exercise from the dialogue, by clicking on the mouse right button on any part of the screen (except for questions and answers' areas).

- You access the pronunciation exercise from the main menu; all the sentences used in the lesson (about 100) are offered for practice.

Replying

Here are some basic tips which will help you during the exercise:

- *Wait until after the beep:* **TaLk to Me** will not accept your reply if you speak too soon.

- *Avoid pauses while replying:* **TaLk to Me** will automatically assume that you have finished speaking and will attempt to evaluate your performance. Your score will thus be lower than it should be. A pause for **TaLk to Me** means a silence of more than 0.5 seconds.

- *Limited speaking time:* you will have a maximum of four seconds 'talking time'. For longer replies, you will need to speak reasonably fast or the computer will cut in.

Functions available

The following functions can be accessed during the pronunciation exercise by clicking on the corresponding button:

Selecting a different sentence: you can select a different sentence at any time.

Selecting one of your own attempts: All your attempts are stored on the hard drive, so that you can go back, listen to yourself again, see your score and the graphic representation. Simply select the sentence you wish to hear again by highlighting it in the selection box.

Selecting a section of the representation: TaLk to Me is set automatically to play the whole of a sentence (either yours or the model), but you may wish to choose just one section of it on which to work.

Playing the model version: use this function to listen to the model version again. Note that if a section of the sentence has been highlighted, only that section will be played.

Playing your own version: use this function to listen to your own version again. Note that if a section of the sentence has been highlighted, only that section will be played.
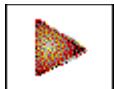
Pause : you may pause either during the model version or before you reply. Click on the button again to resume the lesson.
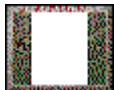
Exit: exit from the pronunciation exercise and return to the main menu of **TaLk to Me** or to the dialogue.

Modes

There are three different modes:

- *Playing* your version/the model.

- *Waiting* for the sentence to be repeated.

- *Pause* as required.
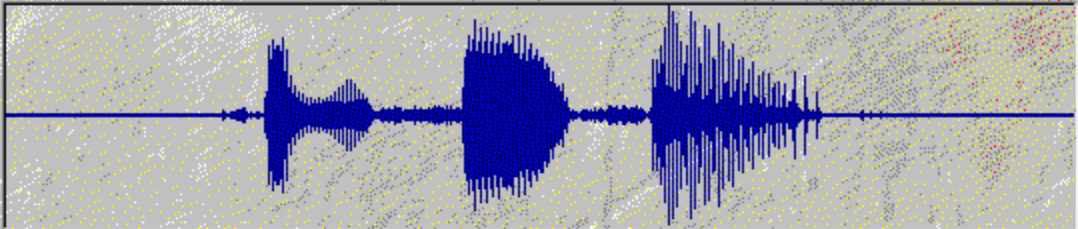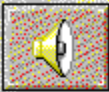
Listening and repeating

TaLk to Me plays the model version of the sentence you have selected, you repeat it and are given a score of between 1 and 7. **TaLk to Me** plays the model as many times as you require.
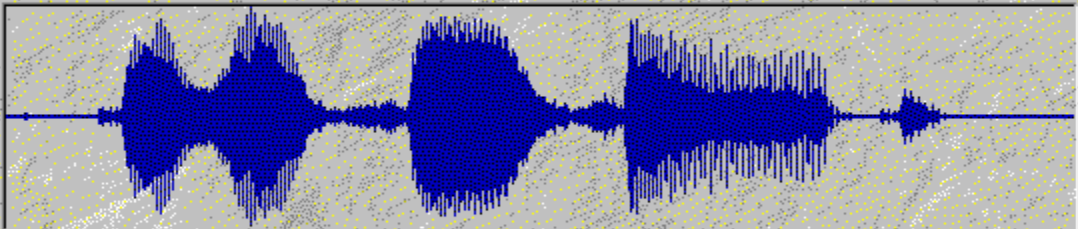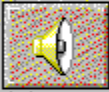
You may **pause** or **exit** when you wish.
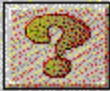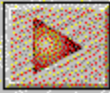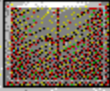
Imitation

This is the basic, underlying principle of **TaLk to Me**.

Section <u>Improving your pronunciation</u> gives instructions and advice on how to use imitation to improve your pronunciation.

The scoring system also relies on imitation - the closer your version is to the model, the higher your score will be.

Listening to the recording

You can go back and listen to the model version again. You can also go back and listen to your own attempts, which are stored on the hard drive.

The selection box shows which attempt you are replaying and what score you have obtained; choose different attempts by moving the cursor up/down.

Click once on the selected attempt to display the graphic representation on screen.

Click twice if you wish to hear the recording as well as 'seeing' it.

Score

The score (1 - 7) for each attempt, displayed above the graphic representation, is also shown as a row of red squares (1 square = 1 point etc.).

If your score is equal to or above the acceptance level, the graphic representation will be the same colour as that of the model.

If, however, your score is below the acceptance level, your graphic representation will be displayed in a different colour.

TaLk to Me awards you a score based on the shortfall between your attempt and the model version.

You can improve your pronunciation by repeating a sentence (varying intonation, stress, rhythm) until your score improves. This indicates that you are getting closer to the model version.
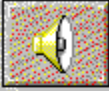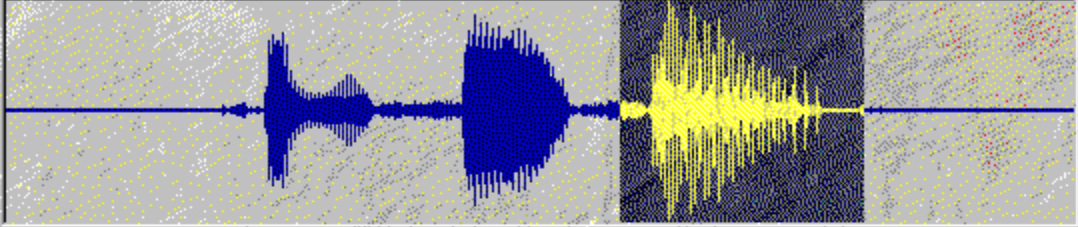
There is thus no need for a male student to try to approximate the model as spoken by a female, but merely to imitate intonation, rhythm etc.
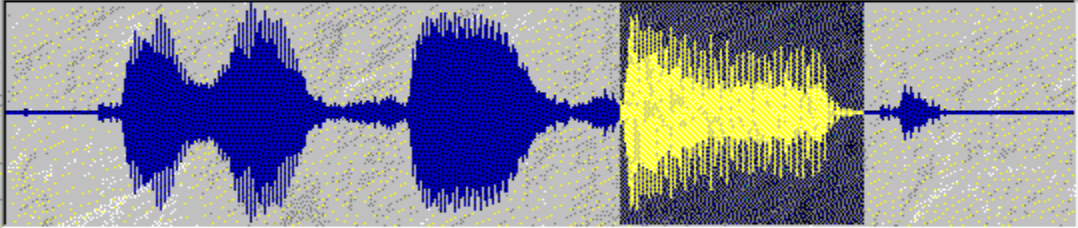
Selecting a section

TaLk to Me will automatically play the whole of your version/the model. You may however, wish to select just one area of the sentence.
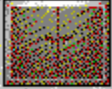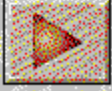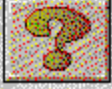
Select a section by:

- **positioning** the mouse pointer at the beginning of the section you wish to work on,
- **clicking** on the left mouse button,
- **moving** the cursor keeping the button down,
- **release** the button when the mouse pointer is at the end of the section you wish to work on.

This way, you will only hear that section of the sentence.

Statistics

At the bottom of the screen, a small box permanently displays the following information:

- **number of attempts** of the pronunciation exercise,
- **number of attempts rejected**: *you spoke too soon, you spoke for too long, or too loudly etc.*
- **highest score**,
- **average score for all accepted attempts,**
- **lowest score.**
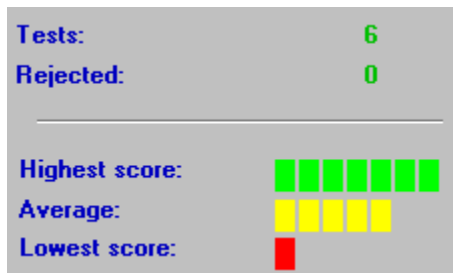
Startup

To check on or alter settings, simply select *"Options"* from the main menu.

Certain settings can be accessed directly from within the dialogue, e.g. *acceptance level* and *volume*.

Volume control

To increase the volume, click on the right arrow or move the centre bar towards the right.

To decrease the volume, click on the left arrow or move the centre bar leftwards. The volume level is shown in the centre of the window.

To save the new volume level before exiting, press **OK**. To save the previous level, choose **Cancel**.

Acceptance level

Adjusting the acceptance level allows you to adapt the level of difficulty to your level or to the level you wish to attain (see Chapter <u>Pronunciation exercise</u>).

To increase the level, click on the right arrow or move the centre bar to the right.

To decrease the level, click on the left arrow or move the centre bar leftwards. The new level is shown in the centre of the window.

To save the new level before exiting, press **OK**. To save the previous level, choose **Cancel**.

Displaying texts

During the dialogue, three text windows are displayed:

- _Question:_ the question text is shown at the top right hand side while the model version is played.

- _Student answers:_ after listening to the question, you respond using one of the answers displayed at the bottom right hand side of the screen.

- _Computer messages:_ once your reply is recognized, **TaLk to Me** may display a message above the question.

During the dialogue, these three parameters govern text display on screen.

A mark to the left of any of these three parameters (_questions, answers, computer messages)_ indicates that the text will be displayed during the dialogue.

If there is no mark, no text will be displayed.

Fonts

During the dialogue, four different types of text may be displayed:

- *Question:* the question text is displayed at the top right of the screen while the model version is playing.

- *Student replies:* after listening to the model, you respond from one of the possible answers shown at the bottom right hand side of the screen.

- *Computer messages:* once **TaLk to Me** has recognized your response, a message may be displayed above the question text.

- *Error message:* **TaLk to Me** will display an error message at the bottom of the screen if you do not respond in the correct way.

The font used to display text will depend upon which of these four categories it fits into.

On selecting one of these, you will be offered the choice of character font and size.

Once you have chosen your font and size, an example will be displayed to the right of the window.

Waiting for an answer

You may choose between a text or symbol message.

Background noise

TaLk to Me analyses background noise in the environment where you are working and adapts voice recognition accordingly.

<u>**NB**</u> : do not speak, touch the microphone or make any other noise whilst **TaLk to Me** measures the level of background noise (approximately 1 second).

This function allows **TaLk to Me** to distinguish between a quiet environment and a noisier one; access it if you feel that recognition has dropped markedly (your score will drop dramatically).

System information

You can view the setup of your system with this option.

You can obtain information about your graphic card, your sound card and the computation speed of your computer.

Startup

To start the exercises, select *"Exercises"* from the main menu.

They can be started from within the dialogue by clicking on the appropriate icon.

You can exit, request the answer or corrected version of the completed exercises at any time by clicking on one of the buttons below:
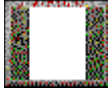
 Exit   *Answer*   *Correction*

Word association
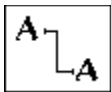
This exercise provides columns of words/phrases; you must link the appropriate pairs.
To do this, position the mouse pointer on the first word, click on the mouse button and hold it down whilst dragging the pointer to the appropriate word.

Fill in the blanks

Choose words/phrases as shown in the box at the bottom to fill in the blanks.
Move the mouse pointer to your chosen word, click on it and hold the button down whilst moving the mouse to the corresponding gap.

Word order

Here, you must put a sentence in the correct order by moving the words in the top box to the bottom one.
Double clicking on a word will automatically send it to the first available gap.
To do this, position the mouse pointer on the chosen word, click on it and hold the mouse button down,
then move it to the desired position.
Double clicking on a word will automatically move it to the first available position.

Hangman
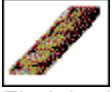
Find the letters that make up a word.
You only have a limited number of tries. To select a letter, position the mouse pointer over it and click.

Dictation
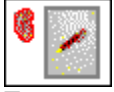
Type out the text played to you.

Presentation

There are three types of help available: *software, information and translation (text and sentences).*

Software help

This icon provides help on how the software runs.

Information

This icon provides information regarding the functions run through the mouse right button.

Translation
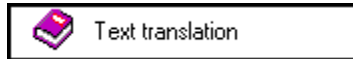
Text translation

This icon allows you to obtain a translation of the text (if available).

Startup

To access lesson report, click on '*lesson report*' from the main menu.

The software displays a report on the results obtained for each type of exercise : dialogue, pronunciation, association, fill in the blanks, word order, hangman, dictation.

Meaning

Results regarding the active topic are stored in tubes. Each tube represents a type of exercise.

Green stands for the rate of success. Red stands for the rate of failure.

The more exercises you do , the more the tube is filled. When all exercises have been done, the tube is full.
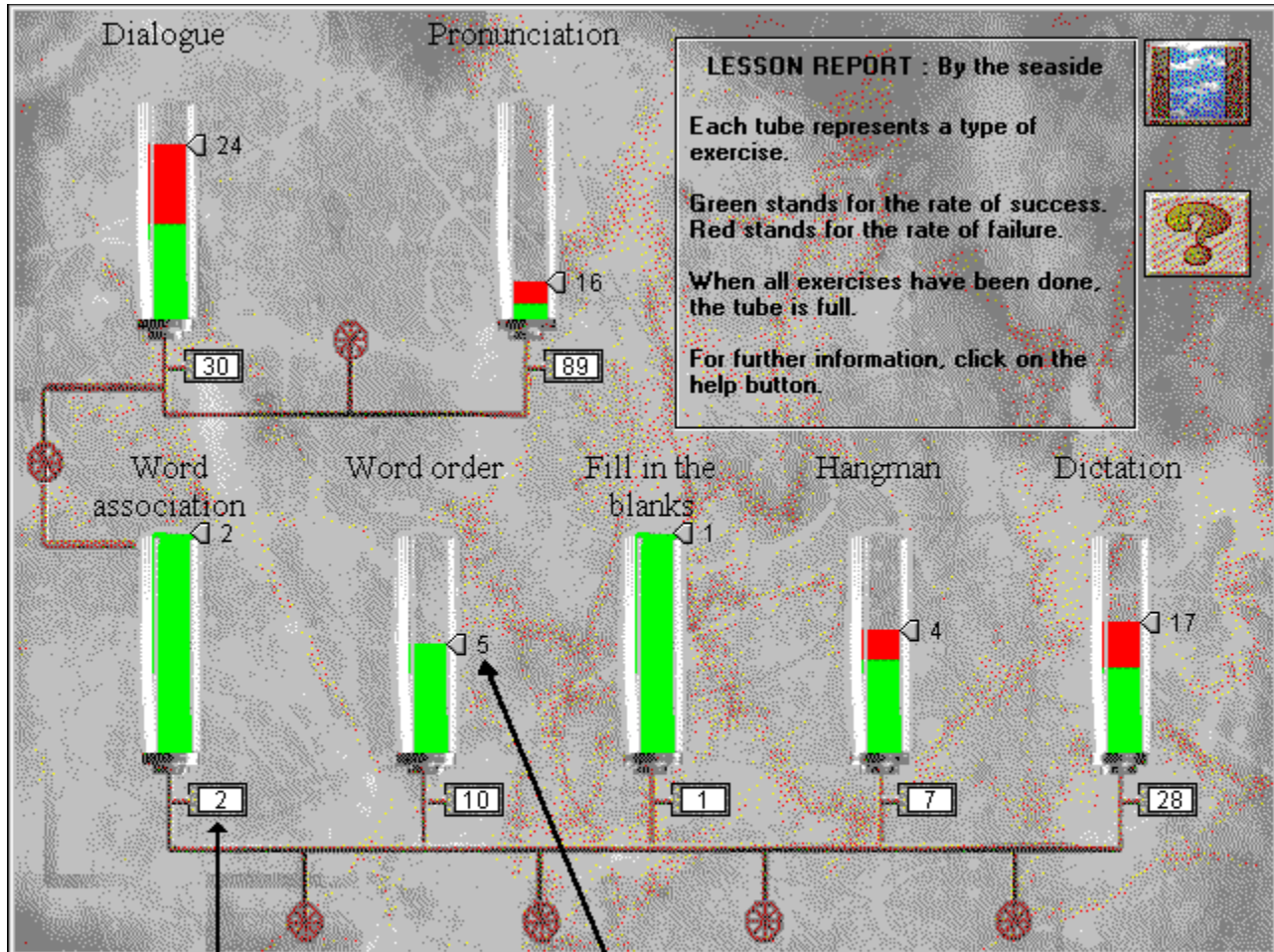
I can't hear anything!

- check that the headphones/speakers are **correctly connected**.

- test them using **different software** or on a **different machine**.

- check that **TaLk to Me** is correctly installed and running properly; a problem may be caused by something else so check for any **other indications**.

- your **sound card** appears not to be working. Check if it works with other software. Try to record yourself using the Windows 3.1 Sound Recorder or Windows 95 Recorder and listen to the result.

- if your sound card had a "**mixing table**" utility, check its levels.

The sound quality is poor!

- check that the headphones/speakers are correctly **connected**.

- test them using **different software** or on a **different machine**.

- is sound quality consistently poor, or only when you are playing back pronunciation exercise?   If this is the case, your **microphone** is faulty.

- your **sound card** may not be working properly. Test it separately from the software.

- if all you hear is a regular, harsh noise, there may be a problem of **conflict** between various cards. Try altering the interrupts and addresses.

- if your sound card had a "**mixing table**" utility, check its levels.

The computer is not hearing me at all!

- check that the headphones/speakers are **correctly connected**.

- test them using **different software** or on a **different machine**.

- speak more loudly; see if the computer can hear you at all or just badly.

- check that **TaLk to Me** is correctly installed and running properly; a problem may be caused by something else so check for any **other indications**.

- your **sound card** appears not to be working. Check if it works with other software. Try to record yourself using Windows 3.1 Sound Recorder or Windows 95 Recorder and listen to the result.

- if your sound card has a "**mixing table**" utility, check its levels.

The computer can't hear me properly!

- check that the microphone is **correctly connected**.
- check whether the problem arises in **both** the dialogue and the pronunciation exercise. Otherwise, consult Chapters <u>Pronunciation exercise</u> and <u>Options</u>.
- try to pin down the problem; ask yourself whether you are following the instructions correctly or whether the problem lies with the **computer**.
- test your microphone with **other software** or on **another machine**.
- if your sound card had a "**mixing table**" utility, check its levels.

I can't run TaLk to Me!

- were there any **installation** problems? Start again, paying close attention to the instructions given.
- check that Windows is correctly **configured**.
- check how much **memory** is available.
- is the **sound card** working correctly? Consult the sound card installation manual.
- there may be problems of **conflict** with other cards. Consult the documentation for each card to resolve this.

I can't install TaLk to Me!

- check that your CD-ROM can be read; check the **TaLk to Me** CD-ROM main directory from File Manager. Consult your CD-ROM drive documentation.

- make sure you have the **correct CD** in the CD-ROM drive.

- check that you have enough space available on your hard drive.

- if the problem lies with the sound card installation, consult the documentation especially with regard to possible **conflict**.

- check that Windows is correctly **configured**.

I always get a bad score!

- see section Improving your pronunciation.
- your microphone is distorting your voice. See section Microphone.
- it may simply be that something is not properly **connected**; see above under The computer can't hear me properly!.
- there may be too much **background noise**; try to work in a quiet environment.

The picture quality is poor!

- do you have a 512Kb SVGA graphics card? Without this, picture quality will be poor.

- is your Windows configuration correct? Check that it is set for 256 colours, 800x600.

- **TaLk to Me** informs you on startup that it can only work with 16 colours. Check Windows configuration and your graphics card.

My attempts are not recognized in the dialogue!

- check the **<u>acceptance level</u>**; too high a level and it will be more difficult to be recognized!
- try to improve your pronunciation using the exercise and keeping an eye on your score.