

## **WinSalsa Version 5.0 Writing assistant for Spanish**

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### **Developer and Distributor**

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### **Specifications**

IBM PC or compatible (or PS2)

Windows 95/98

File size: 4.7MB

Approx.download time: 22 minutes at 28.8 kbps

License: Shareware available at [www.download.com](http://www.download.com).

Installation: Exe file; double click on WSalsa.exe to extract the file after downloading.

Registration: Click on the RegSoft.com logo at the bottom of the main page.

### **Format**

Available for IBM; Not available for MAC

### **Price**

\$50 - individual license

30-day trial copy available at [www.download.com](http://www.download.com) or [www.interlexithaca.com/](http://www.interlexithaca.com/)

interlex.html

CD also available for an extra charge at <http://www.RegSoft.com>

## **Documentation**

Printable on-line manual

## **Description**

WinSalsa is a basic Spanish/English dictionary and word processing program, that also includes grammar reference information. The grammar section covers the main points of Spanish grammar patterns. WinSalsa is divided into three parts: (1) a Spanish-English dictionary with short definitions; (2) word groups; and (3) example sentences. The dictionary contains approximately 5000 entries. There are example sentences to illustrate both grammar points and vocabulary words. The user can also add words and example sentences.

The program opens to “Salsa: Main Window”. Clicking on “OK”, and then on “Use this space for Wordpad or Word ” opens the English/Spanish dictionary and WinSalsa's word processing program.

Below the dictionary entries there are 5 links: Filter, Customize, Groups, Examples, and Exit; plus the word processing window and a Spanish/English toggle. At the top of the screen are the prompts File, Edit, Options, and Help, plus Modules. However, there are no graphics or other multimedia features to guide the user or to explain exactly what these terms mean.

## **Dictionary**

In the main window, Spanish dictionary entries scroll down the left side. The Spanish main entries are single words. Exceptions are, for example, the masculine and feminine forms of adjectives or words which form part of an idiom.

There is a text box for search words, but now there is no alphabetical prompt to enter the search engine for the dictionary. To look up a particular word, the user enters it in the text box and then presses the Enter key, instead of using a mouse. The user can also move up and down in the Spanish dictionary using the scroll bar, up-arrow and

down-arrow keys, or page move keys. If the word is not in the dictionary, a window appears saying “Word not found; press a key”. The same happens if a word is misspelled. There is no Spanish spell-checker, a list of frequently misspelled words, or a list of choices.

To understand how to use the dictionary and find out what the links at the bottom of the screen mean, the user must go to the Help menu, then the Contents or Index screen, and then scroll down to the “Spanish Dictionary” or “English Dictionary”. As a result, this dictionary is not easily accessible without printing out the manual, or continually clicking between the dictionary and the help screen.

The screen layout is not particularly user-friendly. There are no prompts within the dictionary nor is there a search engine. The user has to go to the Help prompt, then to the WinSalsa Help file, to find explanatory comments. Other programs, such as The Interactive Picture Dictionary and The Grammar Rom, use easily navigable A-B-C prompts. In WinSalsa, the user has only two options: to enter the search word in the text box or to scroll through the whole dictionary using the up/down arrows on the screen.

The user can add new words by using the “Customize” prompt, but there is no feedback from WinSalsa to indicate whether spelling or usage is correct. This means the user has to find the meaning of the word by checking a standard dictionary and then adding it to WinSalsa. This is unfortunate since feedback features have been available since the early 1980s. (Peterson, M.)

## **Topic Lists**

WinSalsa's main window presents a group of alphabetized topics, such as Birds, Food, and Furniture. There are no multimedia features such as graphics, photos, animation, or sound to illustrate the topics, as there are in PC SPANISH. To search for a Group, you must enter the name in the text box next to “Group?” and press the enter key (instead of using the mouse).

If a word is not covered by a WinSalsa topic heading, new words or groups can be added. The process is made complicated by the use of unclear terms like “Filter” and “Customize”. (The user should click on these keys to view, edit or delete or add new entries.) These terms are defined in the Index. The information may also be available under Contents, but there is no search engine for the Contents file, so the user has to open many files to try and find the information. Many of the Contents files open into lengthy lists of other files. The reviewers tried to find “Filter” in the Contents file, but

could not. One particularly annoying feature is the lack of a back key - after each unsuccessful search, the user has to return to the main window.

## **Example Sentences**

One of the menu options on the main screen is “Examples.” If the dictionary contains the word being looked up, there may or may not be an example sentence using the word. For example, the word “segun” ‘according to’, has no example sentence, leaving the user to guess how it is used, and wherein the sentence it goes. Sometimes there is only one example sentence, even when the word has various meanings and uses.

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However, there were a couple of notable exceptions. The example sentence for “sangre” ‘blood’, uses it as part of a proper noun (the Sangre de Cristo Mountains). This does not show how the word is used as a common noun. Another example, the one for “ni siquiera” ‘not even’, is very open to misinterpretation in Spanish. (“Amigo! Ni siquiera huevos tienes en el refrigerador.” (‘Friend! You don't even have eggs in the refrigerator.’) This is not natural conversational Spanish, and the use of “huevos” here can be misinterpreted by a native Spanish speaker.

## **Grammar**

The author states that grammar information is one of the major components of WinSalsa, but there is no Grammar prompt in the main window. If the cursor points to a verb in the dictionary, a “Conjugate” prompt appears. This is the only grammar-related prompt that appears on the main screen. Clicking here will give a tense summary, which includes a full conjugation in the simple present tense. Clicking on one of the other tense headings will give a full example of that tense. No example sentences are illustrating how to use the verb on either of these screens.

After the user has checked a verb summary, there is no search engine on that

screen to find a different verb; the user has to return to the main screen and type the new verb in the dictionary's search window. Alternatively, the user can use the extreme left or right arrows on the screen to scroll to 'a' or 'z' in the verb list or scroll through a verb by the verb. If the user misspells the word, or it is not in the dictionary, the only response is "Word not found: press a key". There are no choices given; there is no "frequently misspelled words" list or spell-checker. There is no back key.

To find any other grammar information, the user has to go to the Help file, then Contents or Index. The Index file includes many irrelevant files. The definitions and explanations of grammar points in the Contents file are textually dense and rely heavily on linguistic terminology.

## Conclusion

WinSalsa has no graphics, audio, learner feedback, it is not easy to navigate, nor does it have a Spanish/English spellchecker. Given that there are other electronic learners' dictionaries and writing assistants which are easily navigable and offer extensive multimedia features, the reviewers question what WinSalsa offers when compared to these programs.

## References

- Peck, A .J. (1979). Communicative methodology and its implications for teaching strategy. *Modern languages*, 60, 127-135.
- Peterson, M. (1997). Software Review: The Grammar ROM. *ON-CALL*, 11(1).

### CD-ROMS REFERRED TO:

- ESCRIBIEN (distributor: Bilingual Software), e-mail: info@bilingualsoftware.com, URL: <http://www.escribien.com>
- The Grammar Rom (1996). (distributor: Longman), URL: <http://www.awlonline.com>
- The Interactive Picture Dictionary (developer and distributor ProteaTextware), URL: <http://www.Protea@mpx.com.au>
- PC-Spanish (distributor: Tools of the Trade), URL: <http://home.uleth.ca/~pope/tools/htm>