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Information technology — Interoperability with assistive technology (AT) —

Part 2: Windows accessibility application programming interface (API)

Technologies de l'information — Interopérabilité avec les technologies d'assistance —

Partie 2: Interface de programmation d'applications (API) d'accessibilité Windows

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Foreword

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The procedures used to develop this document and those intended for its further maintenance are described in the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 1. In particular the different approval criteria needed for the different types of document should be noted. This document was drafted in accordance with the editorial rules of the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 2 (see www.iso.org/directives).

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For an explanation on the meaning of ISO specific terms and expressions related to conformity assessment, as well as information about ISO's adherence to the WTO principles in the Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT), see the following URL: Foreword – Supplementary information.

The committee responsible for this document is ISO/IEC JTC 1, *Information technology*, Subcommittee SC 35, *User interfaces*.

This second edition cancels and replaces the first edition (ISO/IEC/TR 13066–2:2012), which has been technically revised.

ISO/IEC/TR 13066 consists of the following parts, under the general title *Information technology — Interoperability with assistive technology (AT)*:

— *Part 1: Requirements and recommendations for interoperability*

— *Part 2: Windows accessibility application programming interface (API)*

— *Part 3: IAccessible2 accessibility application programming interface (API)*

— *Part 4: Linux/UNIX graphical environments accessibility API*

— *Part 6: Java accessibility application programming interface (API)*

Introduction

Individuals with a wide range of functional disabilities, impairments, and difficulties require specific technology to enable computers and software to be accessible to them. This part of ISO/IEC 13066 provides information about the Microsoft® Windows® Automation Frameworks, including Microsoft Active Accessibility, User Interface (UI) Automation, and the common interfaces of these accessibility frameworks including the `IAccessibleEx` interface specification.

The intent of this part of ISO/IEC 13066 is to provide information and application programming interfaces (APIs) needed to use these frameworks. A primary goal of this part of ISO/IEC 13066 is to ensure that accessible software applications can be written in such a way that they are fully compatible with the Microsoft Accessibility APIs available on the Microsoft Windows operating system.

Information technology — Interoperability with assistive technology (AT) —

Part 2: Windows accessibility application programming interface (API)

1 Scope

This part of ISO/IEC 13066 specifies services provided in the Microsoft Windows platform to enable assistive technologies (AT) to interact with other software. One goal of this part of ISO/IEC 13066 is to define a set of application programming interfaces (APIs) for allowing software applications to enable accessible technologies on the Microsoft Windows platform. Another goal of this part of ISO/IEC 13066 is to facilitate extensibility and interoperability by enabling implementations by multiple vendors on multiple platforms.

This part of ISO/IEC 13066 is applicable to the broad range of ergonomics and how ergonomics apply to human interaction with software systems.

2 Terms and definitions

For the purposes of this document, the following terms and definitions apply.

2.1
application programming interface
API
standard set of documented and supported routines that expose operating system programming interfaces and services to applications

Note 1 to entry: An API is usually a source code interface that an operating system, library, or service provides to support requests made by computer programs.

EXAMPLE Examples of operating system services that are exposed by APIs include administration and management, diagnostics, graphics and multimedia, networking, security, system services, user interfaces, and accessibility.

2.2
accessibility
degree to which a computer system is easy to use by all people, including those with disabilities

2.3
accessible object
part of user interface object that is accessible by Microsoft Active Accessibility

Note 1 to entry: An accessible object is represented by an `IAccessible` interface and a `ChildId` identifier

2.4
Accessible Rich Internet Applications
ARIA
accessibility framework from W3C that exposes web content to assistive technologies such as screen readers and speech commanding programs

2.5
Assistive Technology
AT
technology designed to provide accessibility support to individuals with physical or cognitive impairments or disabilities

Note 1 to entry: Assistive Technology can be manifested through both hardware and software.

2.6
Accessibility Toolkit
Linux Accessibility Toolkit
ATK
programming support accessibility features in their applications

2.7
automation
replacement of manual operations by computerized methods

Note 1 to entry: With respect to this part of ISO/IEC 13066, automation is a way to manipulate an application's user interface from outside the application.

2.8
automation element
object or element that is accessible by the UI Automation object model

Note 1 to entry: Similar to accessible objects in Microsoft Active Accessibility, an automation element in UI Automation represents a piece or a part of the user interface, such as button, window, or desktop.

2.9
Audio Video Interleaved
AVI
format that enables both audio and video data in a file container

2.10
C#
programming language designed for building applications that run on the .NET Framework

Note 1 to entry: C#, which is an evolution of C and C++, is type safe and object-oriented.

Note 2 to entry: Because it is compiled as managed code, it benefits from the services of the common language runtime, such as language interoperability, security, and garbage collection.

2.11
callback function
function or procedure that third party or client code supplies to a component, often by passing a function pointer through the component's API

Note 1 to entry: The component may then call this code at specific times. This technique is often used by components to signal client code that some event has taken place, or to request client code to perform some specific task.

2.12
clients
component that uses the services of another component

Note 1 to entry: In this part of ISO/IEC 13066, client refers more specifically to a component that uses the services of Microsoft Active Accessibility or UI Automation, or both, to access, identify, or manipulate the user interface (UI) elements of an application

2.13
Common Language Runtime
CLR
Microsoft's commercial implementation of the Common Language Infrastructure (CLI) specification

Note 1 to entry: The CLI provides a specification for executable code and the execution environment in which it runs

Note 2 to entry: At the centre of the CLI are a unified type system, a virtual execution system, and a specification for multiple programming languages to share the type system and compile into a common intermediate language.

2.14
Component Object Model
COM
object-oriented programming model that defines how objects interact within a single process or between processes

Note 1 to entry: In COM, clients have access to an object through interfaces implemented on the object.

2.15
content view
subset of the control view of the UI Automation tree

Note 1 to entry: The content view contains UI items that convey the actual information in a user interface, including UI items that can receive keyboard focus and some text that is not a label on a UI item.

2.16
control pattern
<UI Automation> design implementation that describes a discrete piece of functionality for a control

Note 1 to entry: This functionality can include the visual appearance of a control and the actions it can perform.

2.17
control view
subset of the raw view of the UI Automation tree

Note 1 to entry: The control view includes the UI items that provide information to the user or enable the user to perform an action.

2.18
enumerator
object that iterates through its associated collection

Note 1 to entry: An enumerator can be thought of as a movable pointer to any element in the collection.

2.19
Global Unique Identifier
GUID
unique reference number used as an identifier in computer software

2.20
HWND
unique long integer value that is assigned by Microsoft Windows to the current window, where a window is a primitive of Windows' UI management

2.21
in-process
<UI Automation> Microsoft Accessibility code that is executed in a target application's process

2.22
Java Accessibility Application Programming Interface
JAAPI
accessibility framework for the Java™ SE platform that exposes Java applications to assistive technologies such as screen readers and speech commanding programs

2.23
Java Development Kit
JDK
collection of programming tools

2.24
Java Virtual Machine
JVM
environment in which Java bytecode can be executed

2.25
managed API
API that, when compiled and run, is under the control of an intermediary runtime infrastructure, like a virtual machine

EXAMPLE Microsoft's Common Language Runtime (CLR) and the Java Virtual Machine (JVM) are examples of runtime infrastructures.

Note 1 to entry: Managed code is compiled into an intermediate language construct (for example, byte code) and the runtime infrastructure handles the compilation into machine code. The runtime infrastructure handles programming constructs like memory management.

2.26
Microsoft Active Accessibility
COM-based technology that improves the way accessibility aids work with applications running on Microsoft Windows

Note 1 to entry: Microsoft Active Accessibility provides dynamic-link libraries (DLLs) that are incorporated into the operating system, as well as a COM interface and application programming elements that provide reliable methods for exposing information about user interface elements.

2.27
MSDN
the Microsoft Developer Network, which is a technical information resource for developers who are using Microsoft technologies

2.28
Multiple Document Interface
MDI
A document interface that allows a window to reside under a parent window

2.29
native API
API that, when compiled and run, is not under the control of an intermediary runtime infrastructure such as a virtual machine or CLR

Note 1 to entry: Native code compiles directly to machine code, and the developer is responsible for most aspects of programming constructs (for example, pointers, freeing memory, and so on). Also known as a native API.

2.30
out-of-process
<UI Automation> Microsoft Accessibility code that is executed in a different process from the target application's process

2.31
providers
<UI Automation> components that expose information about UI elements

EXAMPLE Such components can be applications, DLLs, and so on.

Note 1 to entry: These include any control, module, or application which implements UI Automation provider interfaces.

2.32
raw view
full tree of UI Automation element objects in the UI Automation tree for which the desktop is the root

Note 1 to entry: The raw view closely follows the native programmatic structure of an application and, therefore, is the most accurate view of the UI structure. It is also the base on which the other views of the tree are built.

2.33
root element
element of the UI Automation tree that represents the current desktop and whose child elements represent application windows

Note 1 to entry: Each of these child elements can contain elements representing pieces of UI such as menus, buttons, toolbars, and list boxes.

2.34
servers
components of Microsoft Active Accessibility that have UI elements and expose information about the UI elements and/or allow them to be manipulated

EXAMPLE Such components can be applications, DLLs, and so on.

Note 1 to entry: A Microsoft Active Accessibility server has the same role as a UI Automation provider.

2.35
simple element
<Microsoft Active Accessibility> element that shares an `IAccessible` object with other peer elements

Note 1 to entry: A simple element relies on the shared `IAccessible` object (typically its parent in the object hierarchy) to expose its properties.

2.36
Services Control Manager
SCM
system process that maintains a database of installed services and driver services, and provides a unified and secure means of controlling them

Note 1 to entry: The database includes information on how each service or driver service should be started. It also enables system administrators to customize security requirements for each service and thereby control access to the service.

2.37
system service
application conforming to the interface rules of the Service Control Manager (SCM)

Note 1 to entry: It can be started automatically at system boot, by a user through the Services control panel applet, or by an application that uses the service functions.

Note 2 to entry: Services can execute even when no user is logged on to the system. File services, indexing service, memory management, power management, and remote desktop services are examples of services.

2.38
Text Services Framework
TSF
simple and scalable framework for the delivery of advanced text input and natural language technologies

Note 1 to entry: TSF can be enabled in applications, or as a TSF text service.

Note 2 to entry: A TSF text service provides multilingual support and delivers text services such as keyboard processors, handwriting recognition, and speech recognition.

2.39
user interface
UI
mechanisms by which a person interacts with a computer system

Note 1 to entry: The user interface provides input mechanisms, allowing users to manipulate a system.

Note 2 to entry: It also provides output mechanisms, allowing the system to produce the effects of the users' manipulation.

2.40
User Interface Automation
UI Automation
UIA
accessibility framework that exposes applications to software automation or to assistive technologies such as screen readers and speech commanding programs

2.41
virtual machine
VM
computer within a computer, implemented in software

Note 1 to entry: A virtual machine emulates a complete hardware system, from processor to network card, in a self-contained, isolated software environment, enabling the simultaneous operation of otherwise incompatible operating systems

Note 2 to entry: Each operating system runs in its own isolated software partition.

2.42
Visual Basic
VB
visual programming environment from Microsoft based on the BASIC programming language

2.43
Web Accessibility Initiative
WAI
effort to improve the accessibility of the World Wide Web

2.44
WinEvents
mechanism that allows servers and the Windows operating system to notify clients when an accessible object changes

2.45
World Wide Web Consortium
W3C
A standards organization for the World Wide Web

3 General description and architecture of the Microsoft Windows Automation API

3.1 General description

The Microsoft® Windows® Automation API consists of two accessibility frameworks, Microsoft Active Accessibility and User Interface Automation (UI Automation). The `IAccessibleEx` interface specification integrates the two accessibility frameworks.

Although Microsoft Active Accessibility and UI Automation are two different frameworks, the basic design principles are similar. The purpose of both is to expose rich information about the UI elements used in Windows applications. Developers of accessibility tools can use this information to help make applications more accessible to people with vision, hearing, or motion disabilities.

3.1.1 Microsoft Active Accessibility overview

Microsoft Active Accessibility is based on the Component Object Model (COM), which defines a common way for applications and operating systems to communicate. The goal of Microsoft Active Accessibility is to allow custom controls to expose basic information, such as name, location on screen, or type of control, and state information such as visibility, enabled, or selected.

The *accessible object* is the central object of Microsoft Active Accessibility and is represented by an `IAccessible` COM interface and an integer `ChildId`. It allows applications to expose UI elements as a tree structure that represents the structure of the UI. Each element of this tree exposes a set of properties and methods that allow the corresponding UI element to be manipulated. Microsoft Active Accessibility clients can access the programmatic UI information through a standard API. The following sections describe the main parts of Microsoft Active Accessibility, including accessible objects, the WinEvents mechanism, the Microsoft Active Accessibility runtime (`Oleacc.dll`), and Microsoft Active Accessibility clients and servers.

3.1.1.1 Microsoft Active Accessibility components

Microsoft Active Accessibility contains the following main components.

— Accessible Object — A logical UI element (such as a button) that is represented by an `IAccessible` COM interface and a `ChildId` value.

  — The `IAccessible` interface has properties and methods for obtaining information about and manipulating UI elements.

  — `ChildId` is an identifier for an accessible object that is used together with an `IAccessible` instance to refer to a specific UI element.

— *WinEvents* — An event system that allows servers to notify clients when an accessible object changes. For more information, see Clause 8.

— `Oleacc.dll` — A run-time dynamic-link library that provides the Microsoft Active Accessibility API and the accessibility system framework. `Oleacc.dll` also provides proxy objects for the Windows operating system standard controls.

3.1.1.2 Oleacc.dll

The following APIs and functions are included in `Oleacc.dll`.

— Client APIs — APIs that clients use to request an `IAccessible` interface pointer (for example, `AccessibleObjectFromX`).

— Server APIs — APIs that servers use to return an `IAccessible` interface pointer to a client (for example, `LresultFromObject`).

— APIs for getting localized text for the role and state codes (for example, GetRoleText and `GetStateText`).

— Helper APIs (for example, `AccessibleChildren`).

— Proxies — Code that provides the default implementation of an `IAccessible` interface for standard USER and COMCTL controls. Because these controls implement the `IAccessible` interface on behalf of the system controls, they are known as *proxies*.

3.1.1.3 Microsoft Active Accessibility clients

Microsoft Active Accessibility helps accessibility aids, called *clients*, interact with standard and custom UI elements of other applications and the operating system. Clients can use Microsoft Active Accessibility to access, identify, and manipulate an application's UI elements. Clients include accessibility aids, automated testing tools, and computer-based training applications.

Clients must know when the server's UI changes so that information can be conveyed to the user. They are notified about changes in the server UI by registering to receive notifications of specific changes through a mechanism called *Window Events*, or *WinEvents*. For more information, see Clause 8.

To learn about and manipulate a particular UI element, clients use a pair consisting of an `IAccessible` interface and a `ChildId`.

3.1.1.4 Microsoft Active Accessibility servers

Applications that interact with and provide information to clients are called *servers.* Servers include any control, module, or application that implements Microsoft Active Accessibility. A server uses Microsoft Active Accessibility to provide information about its UI elements to clients.

3.1.2 UI Automation overview

UI Automation provides programmatic access to UI elements on the desktop, enabling assistive technology products such as screen readers to provide information about the UI to end users and to manipulate the UI by means other than standard input. UI Automation also allows automated test scripts to interact with the UI. The UI Automation Specification is designed so that it can be supported across platforms other than Microsoft Windows.

UI Automation is broader in scope than just an interface definition. UI Automation provides

— a set of classes that make it easy for client applications to receive events, retrieve property values, and manipulate UI elements,

— a core infrastructure for doing fetch, find, and similar operations efficiently across process boundaries,

— a set of interfaces for providers to express the UI as a tree structure, along with some general properties,

— a set of interfaces that providers use to express other properties and functionality specific to the control type. These are the control pattern interfaces.

To improve on Microsoft Active Accessibility, UI Automation aims to address the following goals:

— enable efficient *out-of-process* clients, while continuing to allow *in-process* access;

— expose more information about the UI in a way that allows clients to be out-of-process;

— coexist with and use Microsoft Active Accessibility, but do not inherit problems that exist in Microsoft Active Accessibility;

— provide an alternative to `IAccessible` that is simple to implement.

The Microsoft Windows implementation of UI Automation features COM-based interfaces and managed interfaces that are included with the Microsoft .NET Framework.

3.1.2.1 UI Automation components

UI Automation has four main components, as shown in the following table.

Component	Description
Provider API	A set of COM interfaces that are implemented by UI Automation providers. UI Automation providers are objects that provide information about UI elements and respond to programmatic input.
Client API	A set of COM interfaces that enable client applications to obtain information about the UI and to send input to controls.
UiAutomationCore.dll	The run-time library, sometimes called the UI Automation core that handles communication between providers and clients.
Oleacc.dll	The run-time library for Microsoft Active Accessibility and the proxy objects. The library also provides proxy objects used by the Microsoft Active Accessibility to UI Automation Proxy to support Win32 controls.

UI Automation can be used to create support for custom controls by using the provider API, and to create client applications that use the UI Automation core to communicate with UI elements.

3.1.2.2 UI Automation model

UI Automation exposes every element of the UI to client applications as an object represented by the `IUIAutomationElement` interface. Elements are contained in a tree structure, with the desktop as the root element. Clients can filter the raw view of the tree as a control view or a content view. Applications can also create custom views.

A UI Automation element exposes properties of the control or UI element that it represents. One of these properties is the control type, which defines the basic appearance and functionality of the control or UI element as a single recognizable entity, for example, a button or check box.

In addition, a UI Automation element exposes one or more control patterns. A control pattern provides a set of properties that are specific to a particular control type. A control pattern also exposes methods that enable client applications to get more information about the element and to provide input to the element.

UI Automation provides information to client applications through events. Unlike WinEvents, UI Automation events are not based on a broadcast mechanism. UI Automation clients register for specific event notifications and can request that specific properties and control pattern information be passed to their event handlers. In addition, a UI Automation event contains a reference to the element that raised it. Providers can improve performance by raising events selectively, depending on whether any clients are listening.

3.1.3 IAccessibleEx interface

Controls that do not have a Microsoft UI Automation provider, but that implement the Microsoft Active Accessibility `IAccessible` interface, can easily be upgraded to provide some UI Automation functionality by implementing the `IAccessibleEx` interface. This interface enables the control to expose UI Automation properties and control patterns, without the need for a full implementation of UI Automation provider interfaces such as `IRawElementProviderFragment`.

The `IAccessibleEx` interface enables existing applications or UI libraries to extend their Microsoft Active Accessibility object model to support UI Automation without rewriting the implementation from scratch. With `IAccessibleEx`, developers can implement only the additional UI Automation properties and control patterns needed to fully describe the UI and its functionality.