Installing dictionaries

OpenOffice.org can speak your language – if you know how to configure it…

One of the biggest advantages of open source software such as *OpenOffice.org* is that anyone can take it, modify it, and contribute their changes back to the community. This is particularly important with language: there are hundreds of spoken languages around the world, and many of them are too small to be seen as worthwhile for commercial companies looking to translate their software. In fact, the vast majority of software never makes it outside of English, and a sizeable chunk of the remainder makes do with "EPFIGS" – English, Portuguese, French, Italian, German and Spanish. With open source software, people have written translations into virtually every language imaginable: Esperanto, Scots Gaelic, Latin and more all have translations available for common software.

OpenOffice.org ships with out-of-the-box support for English, but makes it relatively easy to install support for 27 of the world's most popular languages using its dictionary installation wizard. To help get you started, this tutorial shows how to install support for another language (we chose Welsh). You should bear in mind that *OpenOffice.org* can only support characters that your operating system supports: Mac OS X supports the majority of languages very well as standard, but Windows and Linux users might need to install additional software to be able to use some languages such as Chinese.

The recommended way to install new dictionaries in *OpenOffice.org* is to use *DicOOo* – a special wizard for finding an installing languages. To get started, click File > Wizards > Install New Dictionaries from any *OpenOffice.org* application. A window should appear, listing supported languages for the installer – just choose the on you're most familiar with. Confusingly, this isn't the list of languages that *OpenOffice.org* supports, just the languages that *DicOOo* supports. When you click one of the languages, you'll see a brief description of *DicOOo* and a button – just go ahead and click that button to start the *DicOOo* wizard. The first screen that appears will prompt you to select the language for the installer and choose how it gets installed – unless you want to switch to English for installation, just click Next.

Dictionary packs

On the second screen, click the Retrieve The List button at the top left. This downloads a complete list of *OOo* supported dictionary packs from the internet, so it might take 30 seconds or so. You'll notice this list is a lot longer, including 12 different varieties of French and 21 varieties of Spanish! Select a language you want to install – or multiple languages, by holding down the Control key (on Windows and Linux) or the Command key (on Mac OS X). When you're ready, click Next.

You are now asked to choose the list of hyphenation dictionaries, which is how *OpenOffice. org* knows how to hyphenate words when they wrap across lines. Hyphenation dictionaries are much more scarce than the spell-checking dictionaries, so don't be surprised if your preferred language is missing from this second list. For us,
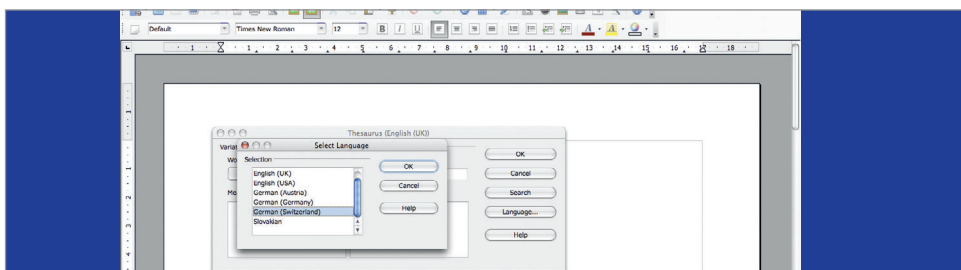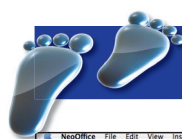
Welsh isn't here, so we can just click Next. Finally, you can choose from the rarest dictionaries of them all: thesaurus dictionaries. These rare treasures (sorry!) are few and far between, partly because most sensible languages don't have as many words for very similar things as English does, so unless you're lucky enough to find your language of choice in this limited selection, click Next to finalise your choices.

Having prompted you to confirm the download size (it's usually around 1MB per language), *OOo* will download and install the requested dictionaries for you. When it's done, make sure you quit the program completely, then start it again. All you need to do now is tell *OOo* which language you want to use for spell-checking and other tasks – this is done by going to Tools > Options from the menu bar, then choosing Language Settings > Languages. Any language that has an icon next to it showing a blue tick mark and "ABC" has spell-checking support enabled. You can also change your language settings for specific tasks if you want to. For example, in the Thesaurus window you can click the Language button, then choose a specific thesaurus language for the current document.
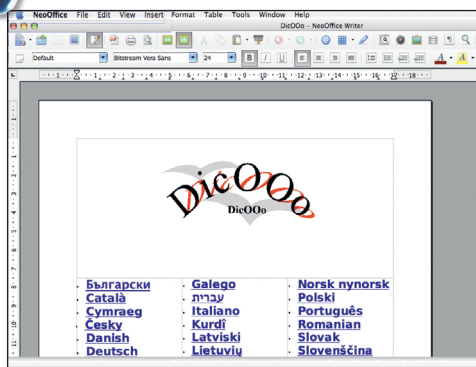
Most dictionaries – particularly for non-EPFIGS languages – get regular updates from their maintainers. If you want to have the very latest dictionaries, try checking back with *DicOOo* every month or so. Just go through the same procedure again, except this time make sure you uncheck the box marked "Do not download dictionaries that are already installed on my computer" so that *DicOOo* will download the latest copy of the dictionary regardless of what you already have installed.

❯ **You can have *OpenOffice.org* use any supported language on the fly by looking for the Language button and choosing from the list you have installed.**
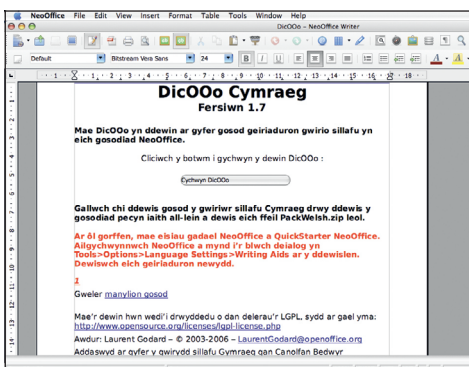
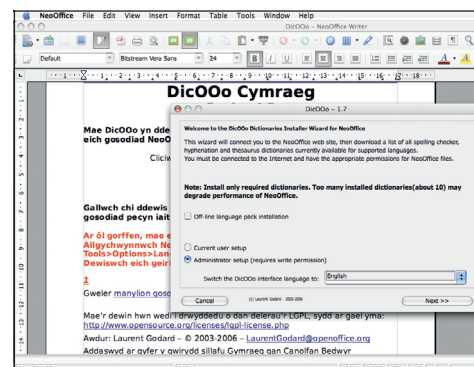# The picture guide to installing new dictionaries

1 What's available?

Go to File > Wizards > Install New Dictionaries from the menu bar. This launches a *Writer* document that lists all the available languages for the *DicOOo* installer in alphabetical order.
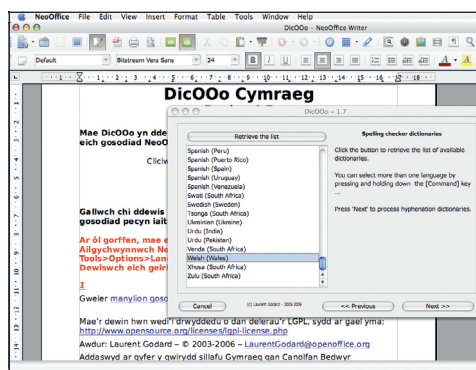
2 Dictionary details

DicOOo will give you a short spiel about what it is and how it works – unless you're really interested, most users will probably want to ignore all that and click the button to start the installation process.
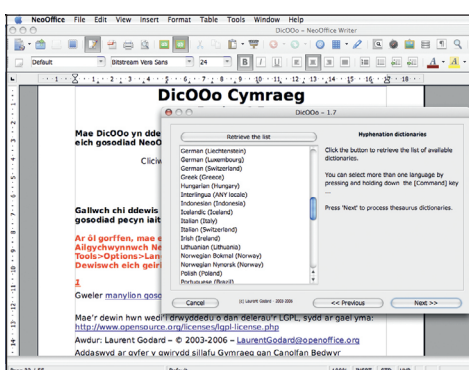
3 Interface localisation

The installer's default settings are comprehensive enough to be adequate for most people, but you might want to change the interface language. Click Next when you're ready.
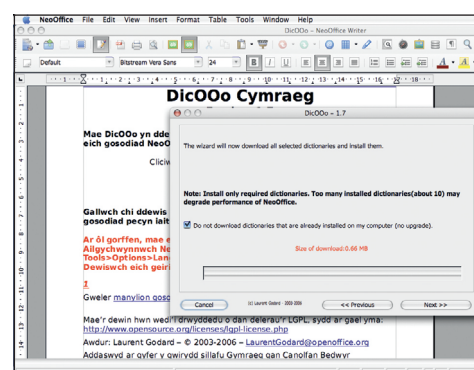
4 Spell checker

The first step is to choose a spelling checker dictionary: choose the language you're interested in from the list that's shown here, and click Next.
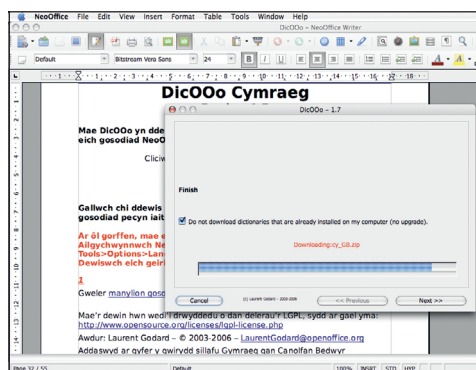
5 Hyphenation

You'll then be prompted for hyphenation and thesaurus dictionaries, although there are fewer of these available. Click Next to skip past them.
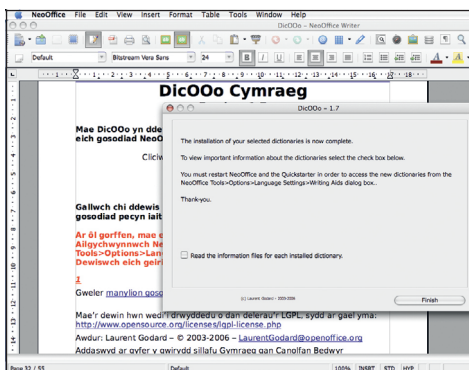
6 Download new dictionaries

This is the confirmation screen: make sure you check that the download size is OK, because when you click Next, *DicOOo* will start downloading the dictionaries immediately.
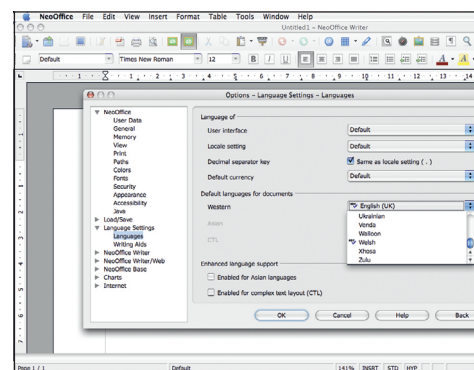
7 Be patient!

A dictionary for a given language is usually under 1MB in size, so it shouldn't take long to finish. Don't click anything: just let it finish by itself.

8 Restart to activate

This screen shows that the installation was successful, but you need to restart *OpenOffice.org* to have the new dictionaries enabled.

9 Enable language support

And finally, go to Tools > Options > Language Settings > Languages to enable support for your new language. **LXF**