

RedOffice 4.0 Beta – A great new UI?

A few days ago I tried the first Beta of Openoffice.org 3.0.

Though OOo made great progress in the last years, I was very disappointed not seeing any great user interface changes - the new icon set could hardly be seen as a great UI improvement...

I have a great admiration for Microsoft Office 2007 new ribbon interface, but no money for paying it - and some principles about using Free Software when possible. I have been using OpenOffice under Windows and Linux since it was named StarOffice (by StarDivision), and have been waiting for innovation in OOo for years... without success. Seeing great Office UI innovation coming from Microsoft is a hard thing indeed!

Today I took a look at the somehow outdated "DerivedWorks" OOo Wiki [\[1\]](#), which lists OOo derivatives. I was already aware of Go-OO [\[2\]](#), making a great job under Novell's impulse. I had also heard of RedOffice [\[3\]](#) as a Chinese "distribution" of Openoffice.org, but suddenly became more interested as I learnt about its new UI coming with version 4.0, still beta. So I decided to give it a try.

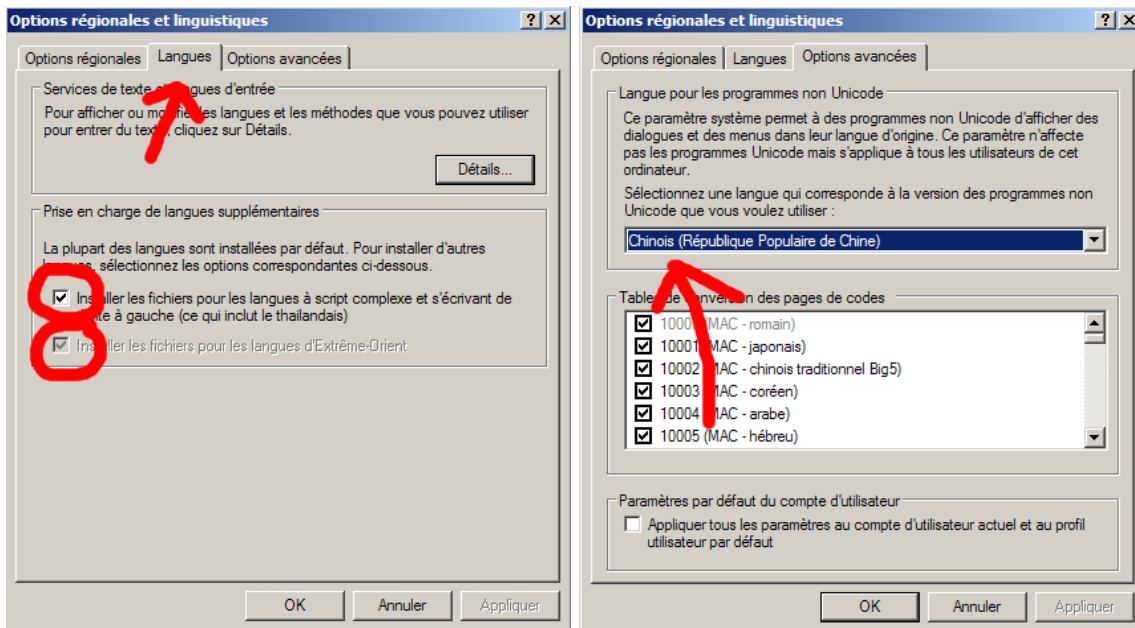
Installing RedOffice



It seems that for now, there is only a Windows version of the RedOffice 4 Beta available. In its final version, it will run under Windows and Linux.

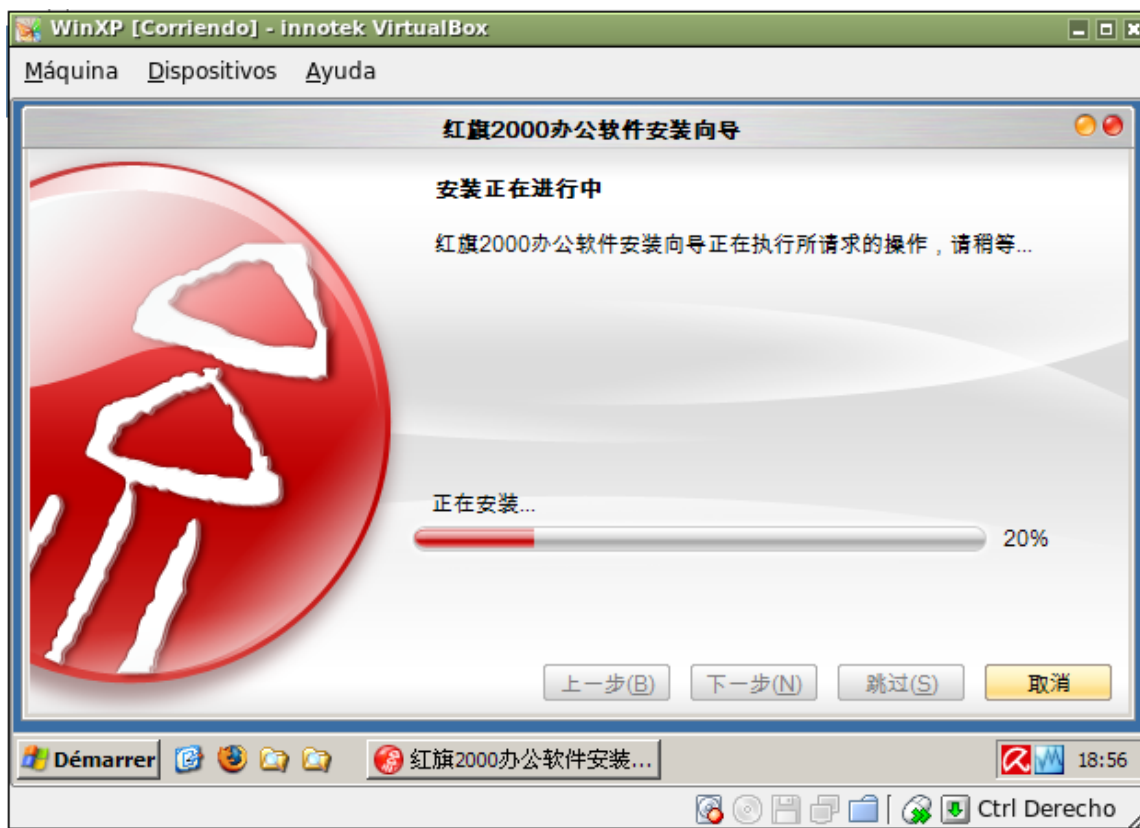
I installed it on my VirtualBox 1.5.6 running Windows XP on Ubuntu Gutsy Gibbon 8.04. The virtual machine has about 768 MB of dedicated RAM, my computer is a Dell Latitude X1 with a 1,1 Ghz Centrino platform and 1.2 GB of RAM in total.

The RedOffice install package is 270 MB. If the first installation box doesn't show normal chinese characters, maybe you have to set up the "regional and linguistic" options in Windows. (Sorry, I only have a French version of XP so my screenshots are in French...)



Once the language set up, the installation should work without problems. You will be asked to register - I could not pass the registration step (I's all written in Chinese, of course...), but one will not be asked to register if the network connexion is disabled! So disabling the network is a good idea.

A screenshot showing the installation process of a Chinese office suite on a French Windows XP running inside a Spanish Ubuntu - note that RedOffice has a MacOS-like appearance by default under Windows!



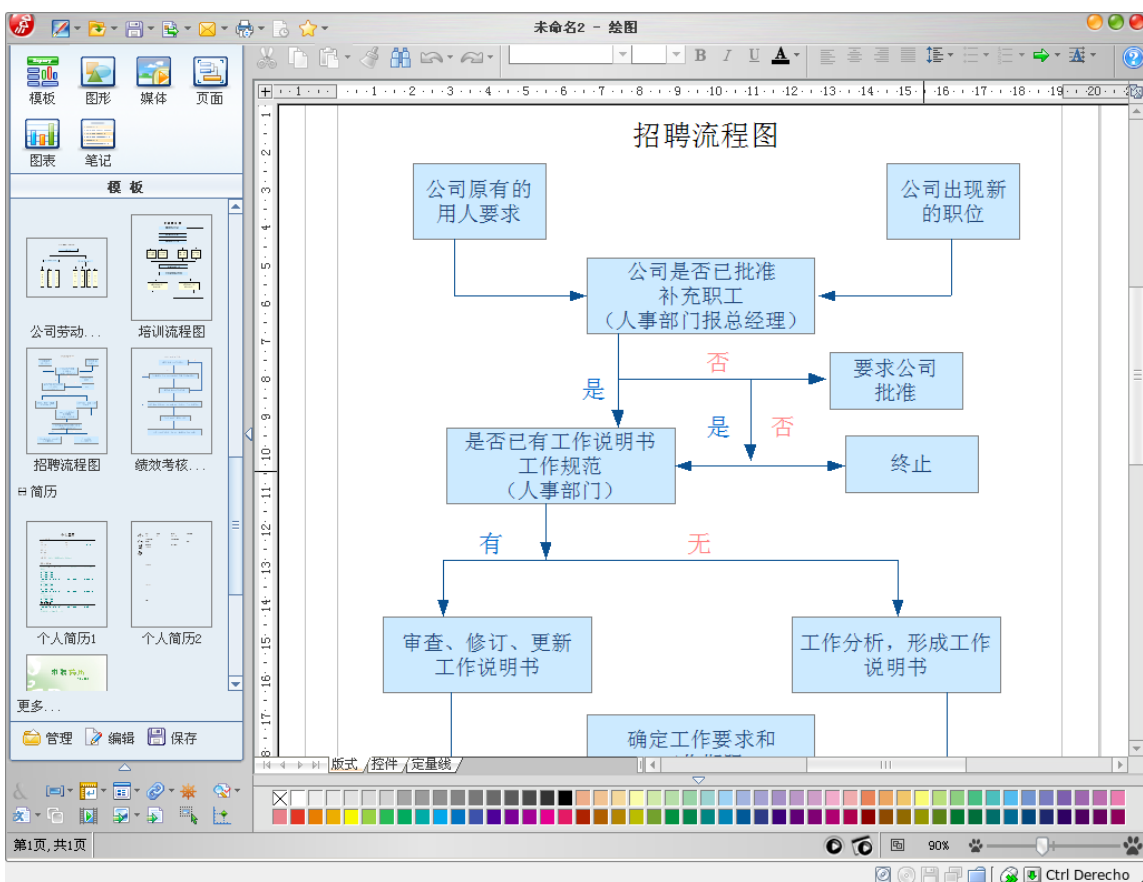
Running RedOffice

Redoffice installs only one shortcut in your Start Menu/Desktop/Quick launch bar. It launches the Start Center. The Start Center shows Icons for Writer, Calc, Impress, Draw, Formula and Database.



Unlike Openoffice.org, RedOffice comes with great templates, shown on the vertical left "ribbon". The Ribbon-sidebar is always shown when you open a new document - by default the templates appear.

Two screenshots of RedOffice's proposed templates:

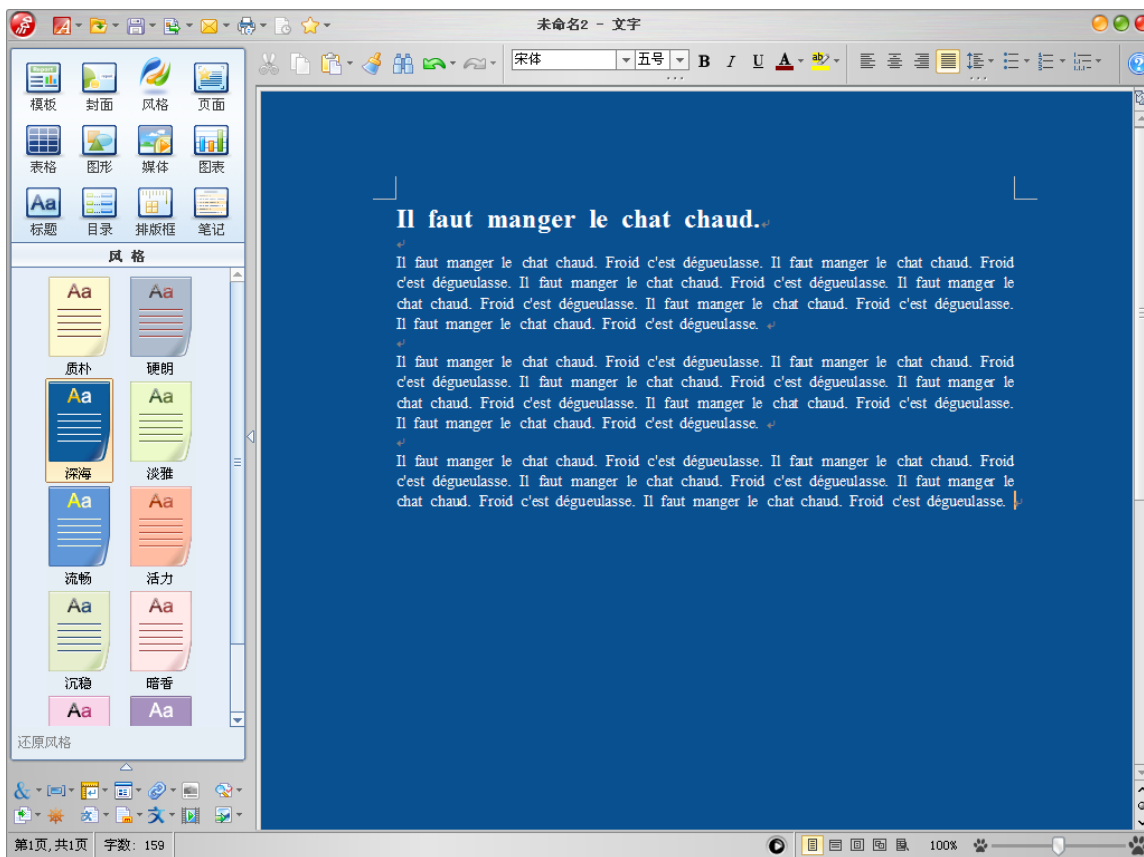


In Writer or Calc, you can use format templates. The format applies already when your mouse comes over a template icon in the sidebar. In Microsoft Office 2007 this is named "Live Preview".

Live Preview is a new technology that shows the results of applying an editing

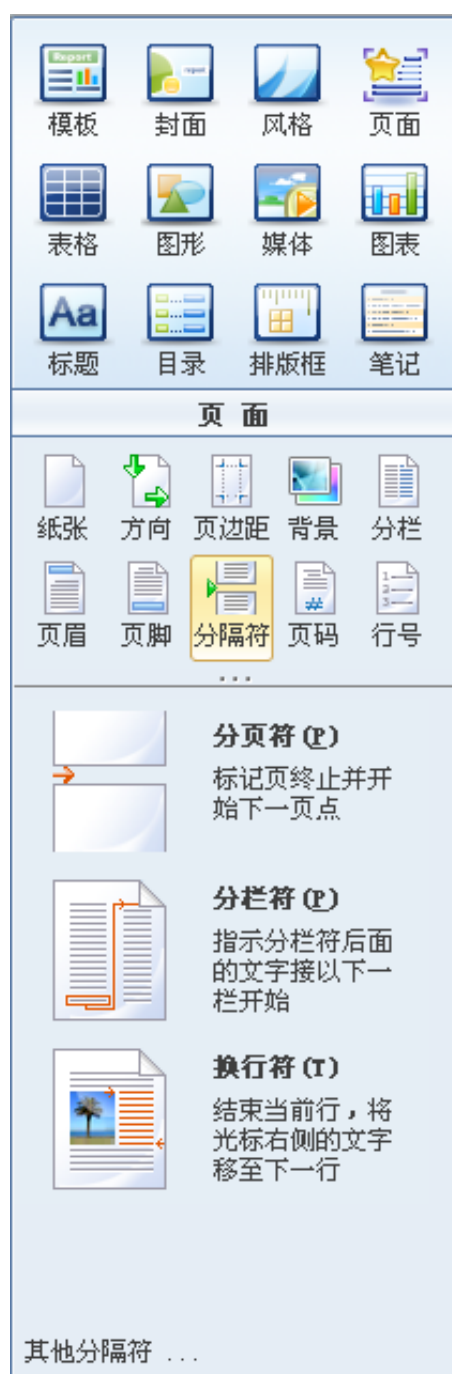
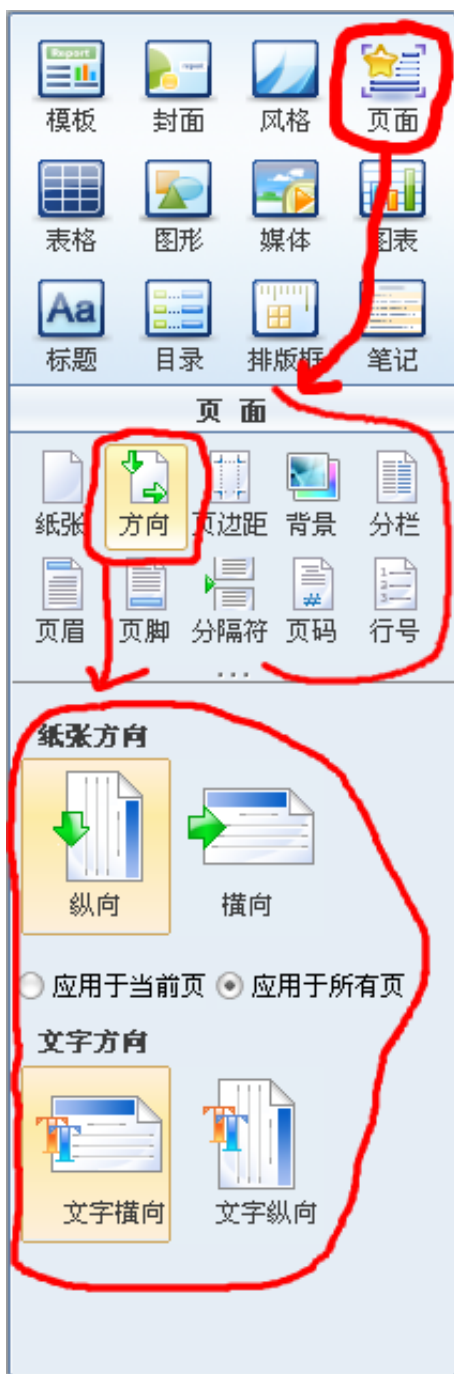
or formatting change as the user moves the pointer over the results presented in a Gallery. This new, dynamic capability streamlines the process of laying out, editing, and formatting so users can create excellent results with less time and effort. These elements are just a few of the new technologies that combine to create the Office Fluent user interface.

Source: Microsoft – Update 12.2010: dead link, removed



The Microsoft-Ribbon-like sidebar, details

Page formatting - page and text orientation.



More page formatting - page margins, shapes:

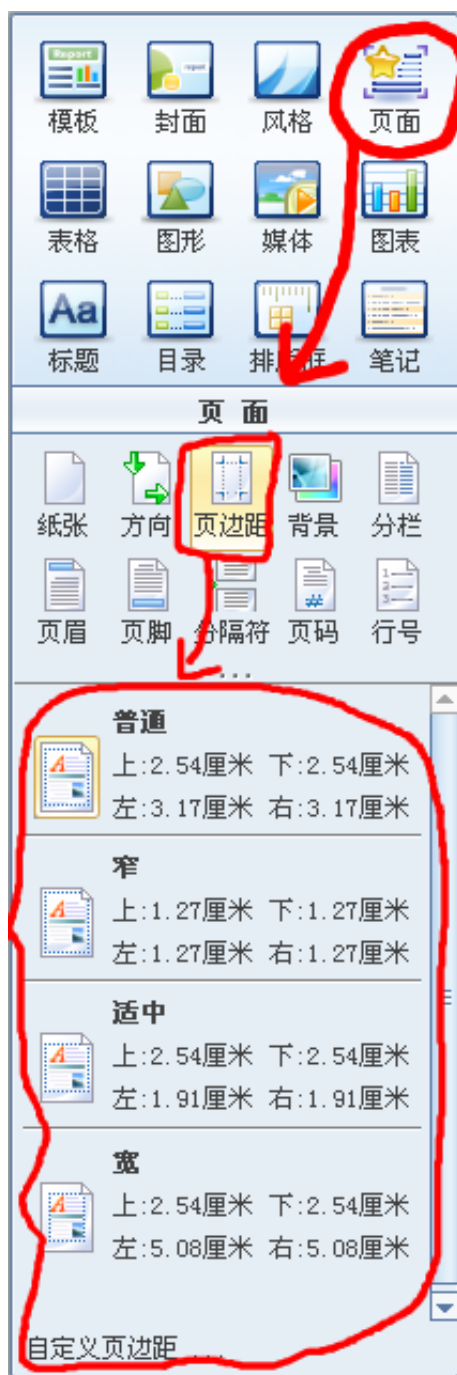
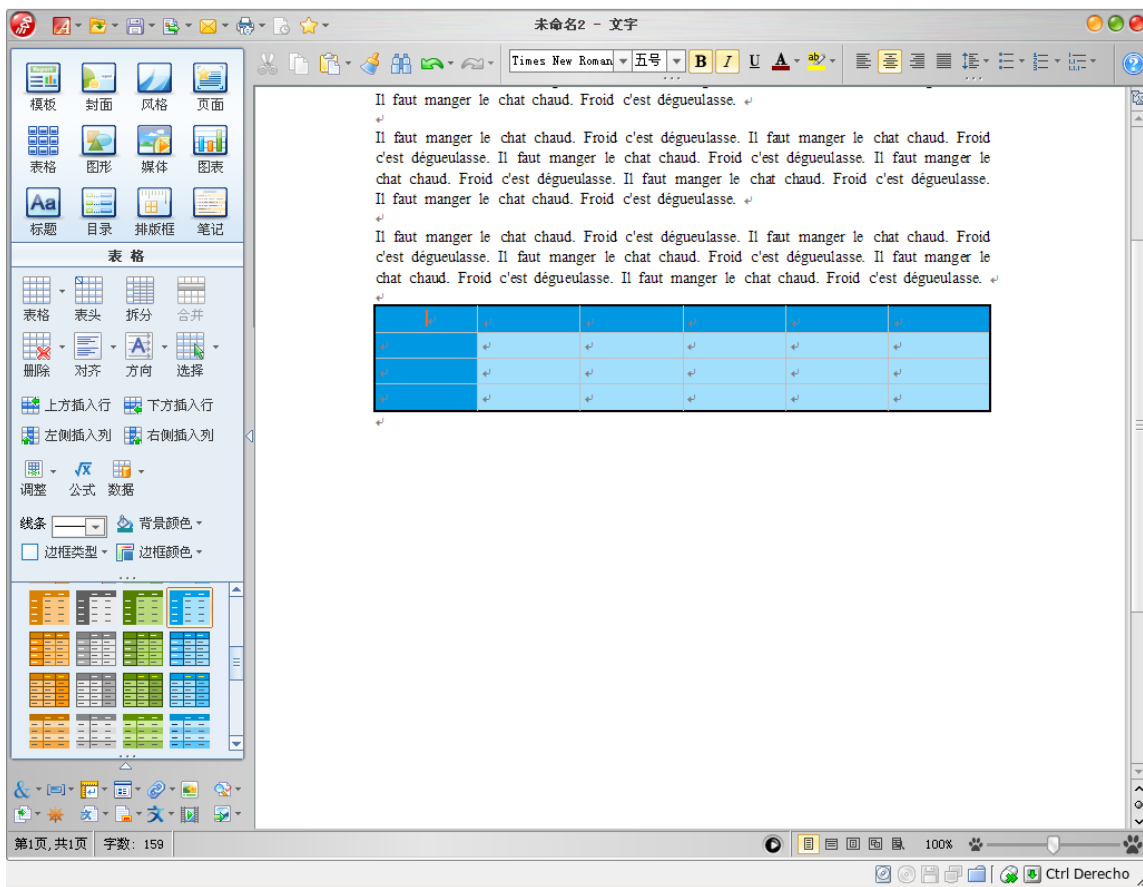
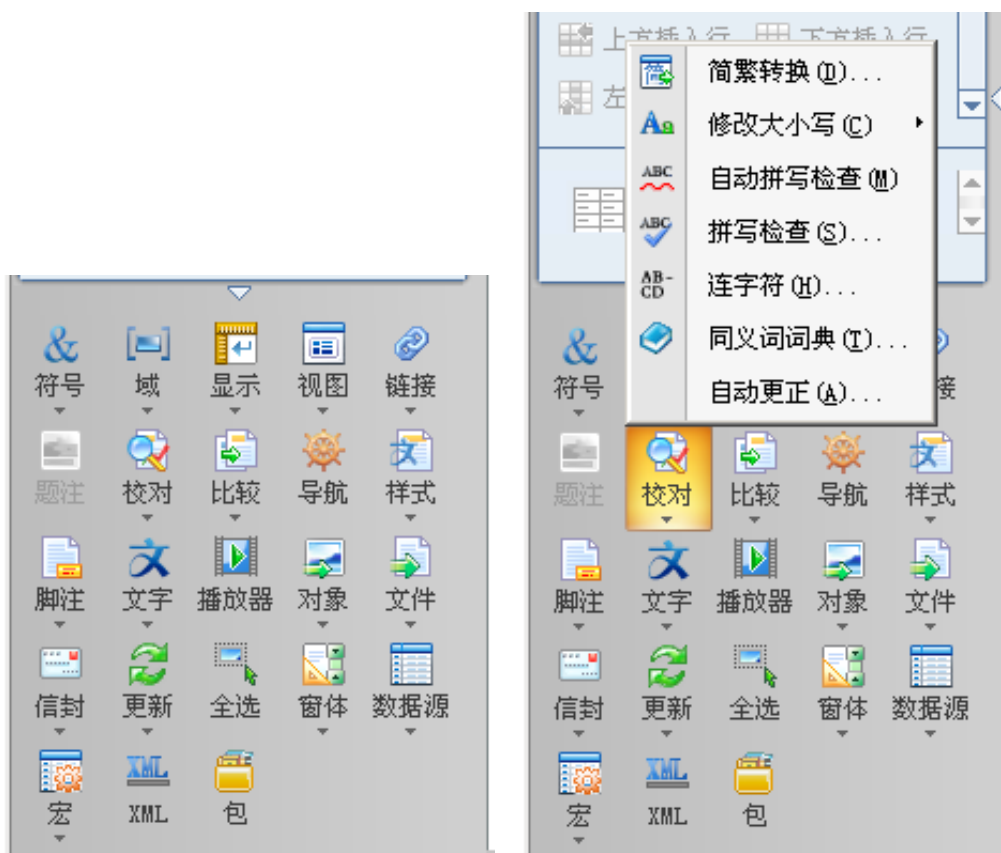


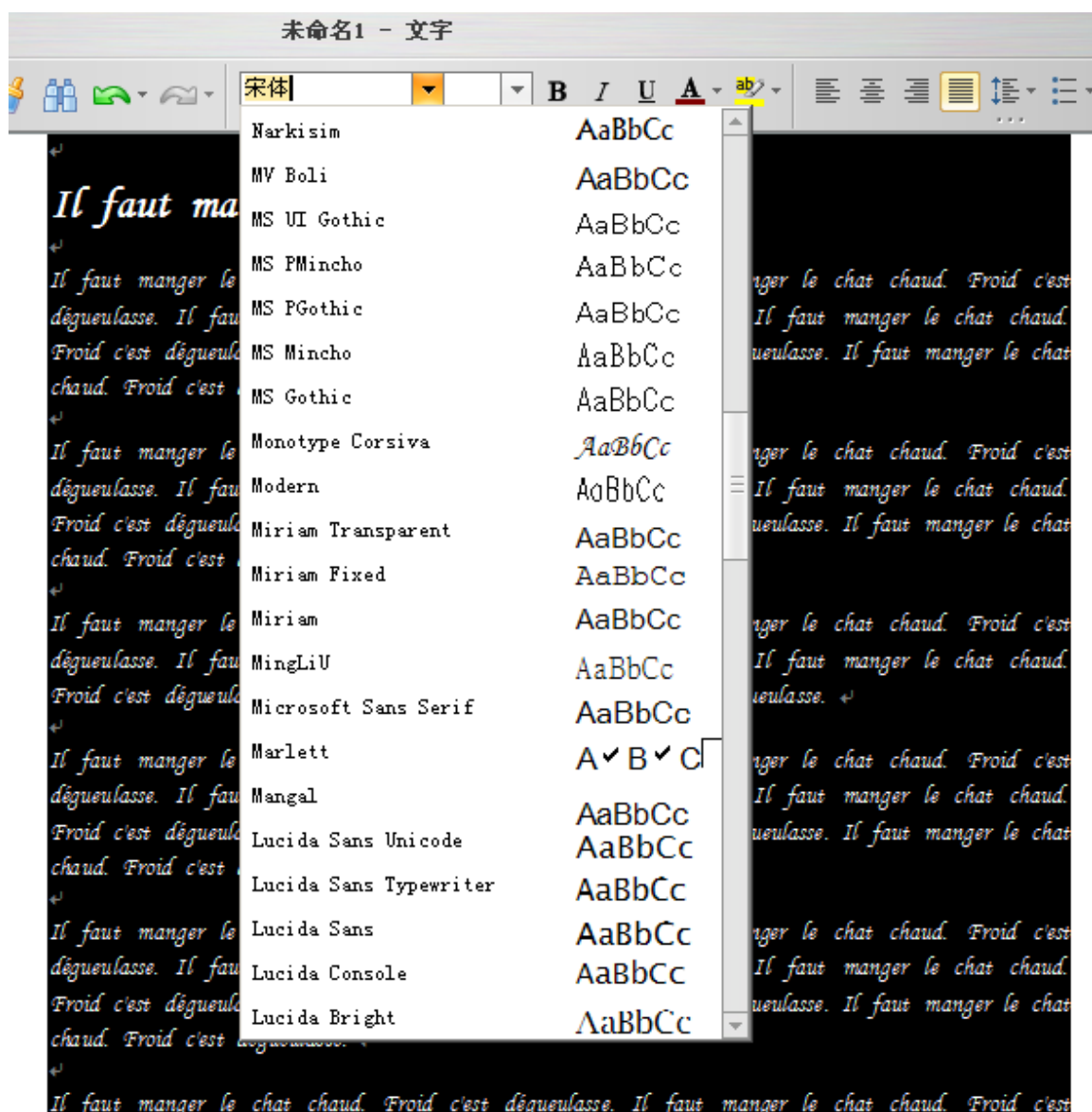
Table options and table styles with "Live Preview":



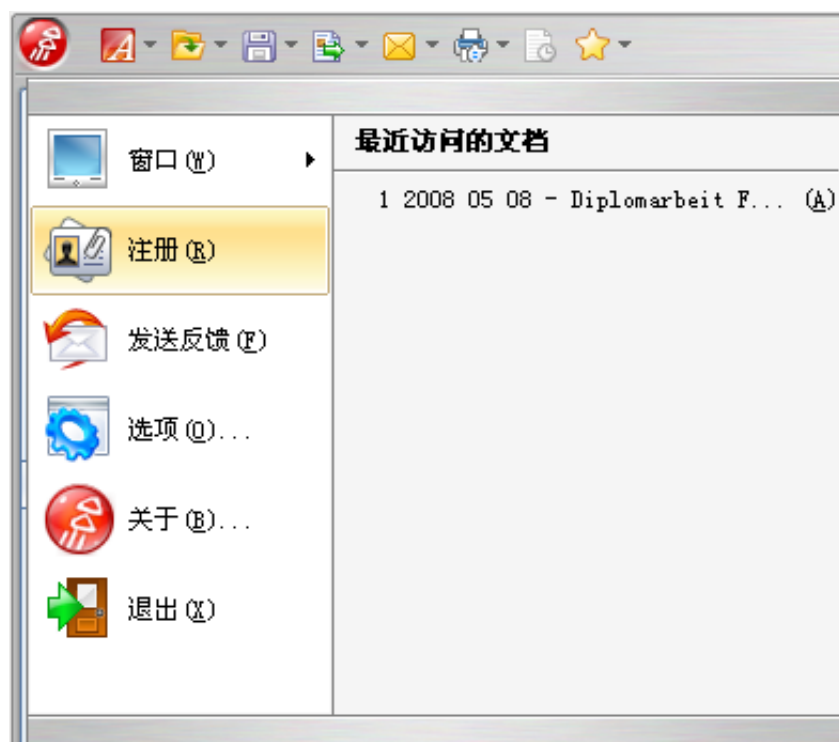
The lower left corner menu expands to show more options:



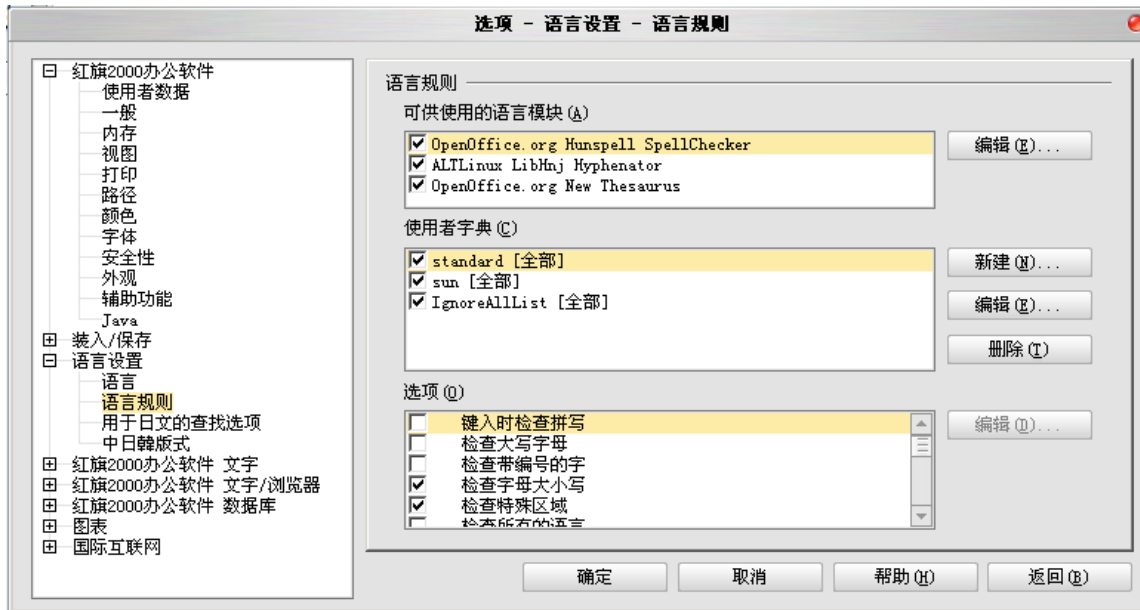
Font selection dropbox with "Live Preview":



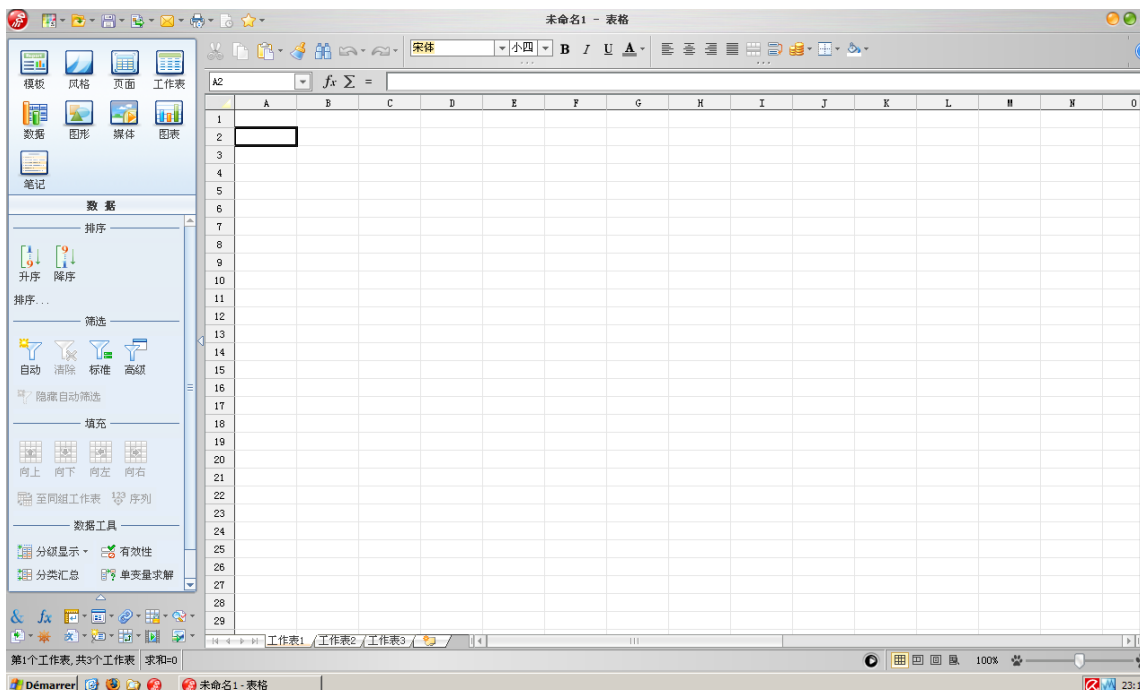
The upper left corner shows an simplified equivalent to the "Microsoft Office Button":

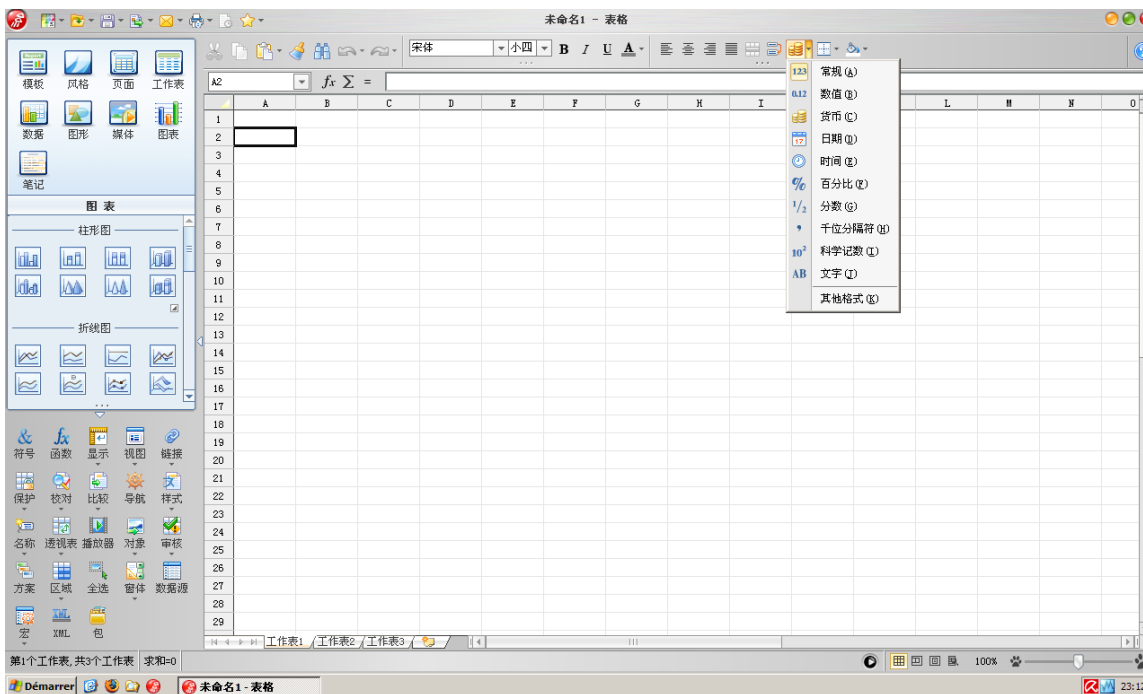
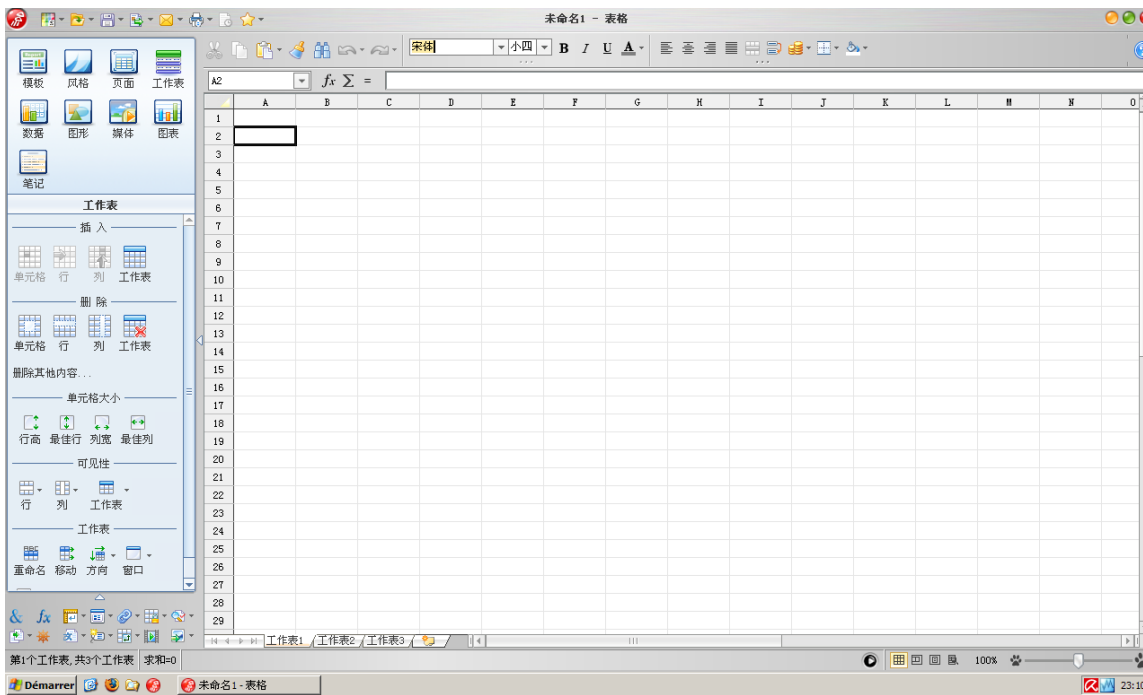


RedOffice Options - at least here it is evident that RedOffice is built on OpenOffice.org!



Some screenshots of RedOffice Calc:





Conclusion

Redoffice 4.0 beta new UI is really intuitive and useful. The "Live Preview" function is great and should definitively be adopted in OOo after 3.0. Though slower than OOo 3.0 beta, RedOffice runs at an acceptable speed on my old hardware. I also hope they will release a Linux version soon.

RedOffice shows a possible way OOo could develop in the future. However, the chinese writing is extremely compact and allows RedOffice's exceptional menu structure. It remains doubtful that the user interface could be translated in other languages without major changes in its layout.

Links

Red Office homepage

RedOffice [🔗](#)

Go-OO, an OOo derivate made under Novell's impulse.

Go-OO [🔗](#)

IBM Lotus Symphony, derivated of OOo 1.x - **Version 1.0 just released!**

<http://symphony.lotus.com/> [🔗](#)

Microsoft Office 2007 interface presentation:

The Microsoft Office Fluent user interface overview (update: source has been removed)

A very interesting video of Office 2007 new interface:

The story of the Ribbon [🔗](#)

Posted by Johannes Eva, June 2008

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