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Translation App Will Help Reach "the Ends of the Earth"

CEDARVILLE, OHIO -- There are more than 4,000 ethnic groups with no portion of the Bible in their language and 1,500 with only the New Testament or parts of the Bible. But a smartphone application designed by Cedarville University computer science students is crunching a process that would normally take years into hours and has the potential for changing the landscape of modern missions.

The Story Producer smartphone application for translating Bible stories was field tested this past summer in Kenya and Uganda.

The app is a do-it-yourself evangelism discipleship tool for reaching minority language communities where communication is mainly oral and a written language either does not exist or is in the early stages of development.

As a result, the process can take from 20 to 50 years because translators must create the building blocks of written speech — an alphabet — before they can start translating. However, it only takes three to six hours to translate and produce a Bible story video on the Story Producer app, which expedites the process of getting the message of Scripture into the hands and hearts of unreached people.

Cedarville's computer science students have been designing, updating and improving the app for the past three years. Seniors currently programming the app are Lindsey Carroll (Pinellas Park, Florida); Aaron Cannon (Canton, Michigan); Justin Stallard (Clearwater, Kansas); Benjamin Ratkey (Madison, Wisconsin); Jonathan Taylor (Westfield, Wisconsin); and Nathan Herr (Linden, Wisconsin).

A still-picture video animation of a Bible story is installed in the app with a base language (English, Spanish or French) voiceover. Then a minority language speaker, who can also speak one of the base languages, records a new voiceover for the video in his or her people's language. This new video will then be shared with other cell phones so that those phone owners may listen to and view the story in their native tongue. The app is vastly expanding the reach and capability of missionaries to share the gospel with unreached people groups.

Each story is reviewed by multiple native language speakers and a Bible-linguist consultant to ensure content accuracy before that content is produced as a new video in the new language.

It's an example of modern technology advancing missions efforts among very remote and unreached language communities.

"With short stories that make up a good portion of the content of Scripture, the overarching story of the Bible can be shared," explained Robin Rempel, a missionary who has served in Papua New Guinea and

Africa who developed the idea for the app as a part of her recent work with International Media Services, which is associated with Wycliffe Bible Translators.

“We are reaching out with smartphone technology to enable small groups of people in these remote language communities to develop material in their own languages to share the gospel with their own people. This app is an answer to my prayers.”

For field testing this summer, Rempel held five workshops over five consecutive weeks, training people from eight different minority language communities. Learning to use the app was only one part of the field testing. Rempel wanted to see if the app was sustainable — was it useful and locally maintainable in places where there’s no internet and no ongoing training from the outside?

“One of our goals was to make this tool localized and sustainable in these locations, so it can be used offline without expensive equipment. It is user friendly and does not require much training (e.g., a week or less)— even for those who have never used a smartphone before,” said Rempel.

“When I started researching for software developers for this app, the companies I looked into estimated that to build the app would cost \$1 million,” explained Rempel. “I had no idea how God was going to bring this dream to fruition. What Cedarville has accomplished over the last three years has been worth literally, that \$1 million. But more than the monetary value, I believe this app will impact hundreds, even thousands of people groups, in the course of the next 10-15 years.

“My personal desire is to develop excellent software while living a life that shares the gospel,” reflected Cannon, team leader of the project this year. “I am blessed to do this through my senior design project. I get to experience the whole software development process, while working with an awesome client and growing personally in leadership and service in my field of study.”

“This project is groundbreaking in its use of technology to advance missions,” said Dr. Seth Hamman, associate professor of computer science and director for Cedarville’s Center for the Advancement of Cybersecurity. “Our senior design project experience is all about stretching the capabilities of our students and helping them segue from academic projects to designing and building complex, real-world software.

“We are fortunate to be able to accomplish these goals while also producing such a high-impact tool for missions. And the students are so blessed to have Robin as their client. As she guides them to realize her vision for this app, she constantly models the heart of Christ to them, and she does everything in her power to champion their work and to ensure their success.”

Located in southwest Ohio, Cedarville University is an accredited, Christ-centered, Baptist institution with an enrollment of 4,193 undergraduate, graduate, and online students in more than 150 areas of study. Founded in 1887, Cedarville is recognized nationally for its authentic Christian community, rigorous academic programs, strong graduation and retention rates, accredited professional and health science offerings, and leading student satisfaction ratings. For more information about the University, visit www.cedarville.edu.