

Story Producer app:

What it's like and how it's different

By Robin Rempel August 2020, revised by Greg Lorei August 2025

Contact SPapp_info@sil.org for any questions or feedback.

[Story Producer webpage](#)

[Tutorial videos](#)

[Download from Google Playstore](#)

Story Producer app brief description



Shutterstock - 379622884

At its heart, the Story Producer app is a Scripture Engagement (SE), oral-audio tool and strategy, but parts of it overlap with other domains such as translation, ethno-arts, literacy, linguistics, media technology and mission recruitment. This article will try to explain the differences. We hope the SP app will help put God's word in the hands of many people.

The Story Producer app guides Android phone users through a process to produce illustrated slideshow Bible story videos in the users' own language:

There are seven steps we call phases:

Oral translation

1. **LEARN** - Listen to the story well enough that you understand it, and practice telling it in your language.
2. **RECORD** - Record your translation page by page. Each page has a picture depicting part of the story.

Checking

3. **COMMUNITY** - Go to the community to get feedback on your translation.
4. **ACCURACY** - Ask a person with Bible knowledge to check and approve your translation for accuracy.

Production and distribution

5. **DRAMA** - Record the approved translation with a person who has a good storytelling voice.
6. **CREATE** - Add credits and a short title, choose options for your video.
7. **SHARE** - Play your video and share it with others.

The vision for Story Producer came from the desire to use readily available smartphones to empower nationals to create simple Bible Story videos.

The Story Producer app strategy (with its various interdependent accessories) is a little bit like ...

- The Jesus Film and VAST
- Render
- Bloom
- Translation Studio
- Oral Bible storying

But it is also different in significant ways from all of these.

Comparison with VAST and Jesus Film



<http://www.mission865.org/media/translation-process/>

SP app: It's like the Jesus Film and VAST! Yes, there are some similarities:

- An oral-audio translation process is utilized, involving a team of bilingual language speakers.
- A template or “shell” is utilized. The visuals, formatting and script are pre-determined. They simply need to be translated and dubbed.
- Translated materials are cross checked and edited for naturalness and clarity.
- Translated materials are consultant checked and edited for accuracy.
- Publication and distribution is done via digital formats (mp4 videos).

But there are also some significant differences:

- Heavy equipment versus light equipment. VAST and JF translation teams and technicians utilize multiple laptops with various software and hardware. The SP app utilizes a single Android smart phone only. This means that the entire process is much more locally own-able and locally sustainable.
- Moving film versus slide-show videos. This contrast breaks down into several significant differences.
 - Talk time factor and lip/scene syncing. Typically, to translate any material from a majority gateway language into a minority language, it takes 1.5 to 2 times as long to

say the content in the minority language. To deal with this factor, when dubbing live action films, the translated content either has to be truncated (some content left out), or retranslated in a less-than-natural way that is shorter. The language must accommodate to keep up with the moving visuals. Or the recording technician has to find clever ways to squeeze in narration and conversation such as during transition times or when actors are not looking at the camera. In contrast, the SP app utilizes still pictures (with optional pan and zoom movement on them). This means that however long it takes to say the translated content for that image, that image will remain in view. The time the visual is on the screen “stretches” to accommodate the talk time required in the dubbing process. Therefore, the dubbing is a relatively simple process.

- The technician factor. Dubbing live action films requires a highly trained and skilled technician, using special software, and usually needing to come from outside the language locale to do the job. In contrast, the SP app enables every local end-user to record their own audio. No extra software is necessary. The process is much simpler. With still visuals, there are no moving lips to have to sync with conversation.
- The dubbing studio and audio quality factor. Usually, when a professional audio-video technician leads the dubbing process for a video, their taste for audio quality will be more particular. Therefore, utilizing professional microphones and a sound proof studio is preferred. We are finding that when locals from non-westernized contexts act as their own audio technicians, they are much more tolerant with “background noise” (it’s normal and natural sounding; not “dead”). Microphones built into smartphones provide decent enough quality, even when a studio is not utilized. For dubbing or dramatizing Bible story videos, the SP app utilizes just the smartphone mic, with or without a field/village studio, as per the desire of the end-user.
- Cost! \$10,000s versus \$0. To translate a Bible film with oral-audio strategies typically requires a fairly large team of locals and expats to travel to the same location and be hosted for 4 – 6 weeks in a centralized place with steady electricity to run all the computers and recording equipment. The local voice actors and audio technicians must also travel to that location and be hosted to dub the film, usually in a professional recording studio. In contrast, translating Bible stories with the SP app is a completely localized process. There are no travel, accommodation or equipment expenses. Training videos are on the phone, and are embedded in the app so they can still be viewed even if there is no internet connection. There is no need for heavy steady electrical power. The users can use the phone they already have, and can work at home, with others from their village, at their own pace.

- Production and publication time. To translate, dub and publish a Bible film requires 4 – 18 months, depending on what type of strategy is utilized. The SP app end users can translate, record and publish stories from start to finish in 1-2 days.
- Ease of interpretation and understandability. The Bible films contain much “denser” forms of visuals. The quickly moving live action with foreign customs and unfamiliar cultural items and context can be overwhelming to people who have had little exposure to western films. The visuals could even cause a distraction from listening to the audio in their own language. In contrast, the simpler, much slower moving visuals used in the Story Producer app are easier to digest. Yes, there is foreignness and unfamiliarity in the visuals, but there is less of it and it comes much more slowly, easier to process. Translation consultant Andrew Sims produced about 75 illustrated Bible story videos for the two remote language communities he worked with in Indonesia. He said that people learned to understand the pictures and the mother tongue narration assisted them in learning how to “read” the pictures. As they listened to the narration they discussed the pictures and figured them out i.e. that’s the king, that’s a sword, that’s a camel, etc.
- Customization. Sometimes in the Bible films the actors act in ways that are confusing or taboo for some language communities (e.g. eating or giving food away with the left hand, Jesus walking around with a purse/bag over his shoulder which is locally interpreted as a shaman’s pouch, inappropriate eye contact between men and women). These cannot really be changed; they have to be repeatedly explained. With still picture videos, if there is a culturally confusing image, it can much more easily be changed or replaced. In addition, other things can be added to the slideshow video to localize it. For example, a photo of a local icon, landscape, design or color can be used for the background of a story’s title slide. And a locally composed and recorded song can be added on to the end of the video to compliment the story.
- Content/Packaging size. It is a fairly big project to translate and dub the Jesus Film or the Genesis film. It’s a big package, a single template. The slideshow Bible story videos come in much smaller packages or smaller stories e.g. Creation, Sin, Babel, Noah, Abraham, Joseph divided into four stories. Having a number of short stories means that the local community has more options for production – they can pick and choose which stories they would like, what order in which they would like to produce them, and the turnaround time from translation to publication and distribution is much shorter.

Comparison with Render



Icon and photo from <https://www.faithcomesbyhearing.com/audio-bibles/render>

SP app: It's like Render! Yes, in a few ways Render and SP app are similar.

1. They are both oral-audio translation tools, encouraging non-literate language speakers to be engaged in the translation process.
2. Both apps are highly iconized for ease of use in different languages
3. Both tools are designed to be user-friendly for national end-users who are minimally trained in translation procedures.
4. Both tools seek to empower nationals to take advantage of their orality strengths and enable a local community to begin a translation project before having to do linguistic analysis and establishing an orthography (which can take years and usually requires some “outside” assistance.
5. Both tools guide the end-user through an accountable translation process of checking and cross checking for naturalness, clarity, accuracy and appropriateness. Both tools mandate accuracy experts to be engaged in the process to approve the translation drafts.

However, there are significant differences:

- End Result. Render creates audio scriptures. Story Producer creates Bible Story videos that are easily shared from phone to phone.
- Scripture vs stories. Render is a **Bible** translation tool. The Story Producer is a Bible **story** translation tool.
- Audio only versus written and audio source material. Render relies solely on audio transmission of the source material. SP has both written/text and audio of the source material.
- Shorter, edited, unpacked source content. Bible stories are easier to translate than unedited/straight Scripture content. Stories can come in smaller chunks and focus on the easier-to-translate narratives. Bible translation has more complexities to deal with e.g. multiple genres, difficult literary structures, more text, deeper need for exegesis and studying mass quantities of translation helps, dealing with ambiguities, deciding if implied information needs to go in the text or in a footnote, parallel passages. With stories there is more flexibility with the text. One can “dodge” difficult terminology or take the time to explain something that is confusing.
- Illustrations. Render is audio only. The SP app templates are audio-visual with many beautiful illustrations for every story. The visuals assist with understanding the stories.
- Operating System. Render utilizes Windows OS while the SP app operates on Android. The designers of the Story Producer intentionally wanted to utilize an OS and device that was easily available, affordable and personally owned by the end-users.
- Devices and maintenance. Render operates on multiple tablets being synced by a central router all working at the same time with a separate tablet for each member of the translation

team. Keeping multiple devices synced requires robust technology, more complex maintenance and a more stringent, dependable electrical power system. The SP app operates primarily offline on a single smartphone. Smartphones, particularly Android phones, are becoming ever more ubiquitous in the developing world and this is a foundational reason why the Android OS was chosen for this app. It is also intentional that the app runs on a single device and the one device is carried to and used by multiple people in the community in the process of translating, checking, dubbing, publishing and distributing the story video. This key factor keeps the technology simpler and more stable so that maintenance is lower and therefore much more locally own-able, locally usable, and locally sustainable. The smartphone is by far the people's preferred device and communities the world over have figured out ways to keep their phone batteries charged, so an offline app is a powerful tool which can be used literally anywhere.

- Centralized team versus local mobile team. Render's technology, process and equipment (multiple devices plus synchronizing router plus robust stable electrical power source) pretty much requires most of the translation team to all be present and to work at the same time in a centralized place. This challenges the mobility and localizing of Render. The Story Producer is designed to be used in the village or wherever the end-users live at whatever time they choose. It is built to be mobile and used entirely at their convenience.
- Cost. Due to equipment requirements and centralized team gathering strategies, the cost for Render's language projects and working times run in the \$1000s and \$10,000s. Story Producer projects are more localized and normally don't require any funding because they use any phone using Android version 7 or higher.
- Activity log. During the translation process, an accuracy checker is not always present. If the story translator takes shortcuts when translating or when doing community checks, this will be evident when the accuracy checker reviews the work. He will be able to see a log of what work was done in the Learn, Record, and Community phases, including dates and times. The accuracy checker can read these logs and get a window into the history of activities that the translators and community were engaged in during the translation process. This information is gathered in the background while the end-user translates. This provides accountability and may be an opportunity for the accuracy checker to train the translators in healthy translation practices. [Render requires the translators to make at least two drafts or a section before being able to move to the next section. The thought behind this is that a second draft attempt will likely be better than the first, and translators should take their time. But if a translator is impatient, they can easily hack this requirement by recording a very short second "draft" (without saying anything) and move to the next section.]
- Navigation. Render has a fairly stiff, forward-only navigation system. For example, once a translator has drafted verses 1-3 and moved on to drafting verses 4-5, he cannot easily go back to verses 1-3. The SP app has an intuitive, grid-type navigation, allowing the user to move forward or backward in a story (left and right swiping) and to move between phases on the same slide by swiping up and down i.e. from the Accuracy phase on slide #4, the user can swipe down to the Record phase to re-record the audio of slide #4 and then swipe up or

tap back to the Accuracy phase to go back to where he left off. Also, when a user has swiped through all the slides of a story, one more swipe will put them back at the beginning of the story.

Comparison with Translation Studio



Icon images from <https://unfoldingword.org/ts/>

SP app: It's like TranslationStudio (tS), TranslationRecorder (tR) and UnfoldingWord apps developed by Wycliffe Associates and Door 43 to translate Scripture and Open Bible stories! Again, there are a few similarities, but significant differences. These Unfolding Word apps and the Story Producer app are all intentionally seeking to reach the nations more quickly and with better accessibility, mobility and greater local ownership via Android OS. Costs for use with both of these strategies are quite minimal.

However, there are several significant differences:

- Text versus oral-audio translation. Translation Studio is a text-to-text translation process with audio added later as an option using Translation Recorder, a separate app. SP app employs an oral-audio translation process for its stories. Text in the source language is also available for reference. Receptor language text can be added as an option to the approved audio draft.
- Publication format and distribution options. The Open Bible stories from Door 43 are published in a manual swiping format via UnfoldingWord app -- illustrations+text+audio (optional), downloaded from the internet. The published format coming out of the Story Producer app is an mp4 or 3gp file (slideshow video) and can be shared from phone to phone via Bluetooth, SHAREit, SD card swapping, or via multiple on-linen options.
- Story content. Open Bible Stories via Door 43 and UnfoldingWord app are more condensed or summarized than are the story templates available via the SP app. The SP app stories utilize more illustrations and include more story details.

Comparison with BLOOM and Shellbooks

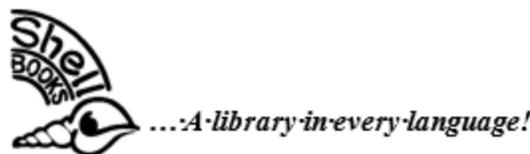


image from <http://bloomlibrary.org/landing>

SP app: It's like Bloom and shellbooks! Yes, partially. The primary commonalities are:

- They all utilize mostly Creative Commons templates to enable fast, easy and quality production of language materials.
- They all seek to build local capacity to quickly develop a library of materials in languages that have never or only recently been written.

This biggest differences are:

- Print book format versus digital video. Bloom was originally designed to make printed books; a simpler way to work with shell books than using Word, Publisher or InDesign. The Story Producer is designed to produce colorful digital video materials (with or without text, with or without audio, etc.), not printed materials. Bloom is now able to produce a broader array of audio-visual materials¹. Bloom is hoping to eventually output video formats which can be viewed on phones.
- Mobility. Bloom's OS is HTML5 and is designed for use on a computer or tablet. It can be utilized online via a browser or the software and the stories can be downloaded for offline production. It requires a fair amount of screen real estate. The SP app is designed for use on Android phones, primarily off-line after installation. Typically, Bloom is used where there is a steady robust power source in a centralized place. SP is designed for local use on a smartphone or other device, right where the end-user lives or wherever they go.
- Guided translation process. Bloom is not a translation program. Any translation of materials has to be done apart from, outside of or prior to using Bloom as a publisher. The Story Producer guides the end-user through an oral-audio translation process.

Story Producer uses stories that are in the Bloom format, so Bloom can be used to create new stories for Story Producer. Note that Bloom has developed feature capabilities to create and publish slideshow type stories, complete with describing pan and zoom Ken Burns effects, attaching music or sound effects to images, along with recording audio narration for each image.

Comparison with Oral Bible Storying

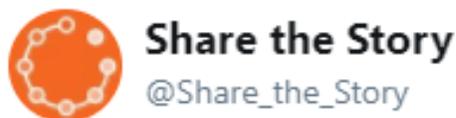


Image from https://twitter.com/Share_the_Story/

image from <https://orality.net/content/oral-bible-storytelling/>

SP app: It's like Oral Bible Storying! Yes, there are a number of similarities between the Story Producer app and Chronological or Oral Bible Storying. Primarily, and specifically:

- The content is all about Bible stories, more or less summarized or condensed from Scripture.
- They emphasize orality – oral translation processes, oral means of communication for distribution of the stories ... to capitalize on the strengths of predominantly oral societies.
- They strive for and focus on high local ownership and sustainability. These strategies utilize means of communication that are common everyday occurrences in oral societies (i.e. people talking and using cell phones).
- They all utilize accountable translation procedures in the process of localizing the stories. Naturalness, clarity and accuracy checks by reviewers and consultants are a mandatory part of the process.
- In the world of Bible translation language programs, oral storying and passing along Bible stories in the language is a strategy that can be beneficially implemented before, during, and after formal linguistic and Bible translation activities. “Progressive engagement” is a strategy being utilized more and more by Language Program Coordinators around the world to empower local language communities who desire the Scriptures in their own language to get a start on the long process by starting with helpful activities that they can do to show their local support and commitment to Bible translation. For example, these helpful Progressive Engagement activities might include:
 - Hosting an Ethno-arts music composition production workshop and contest
 - Helping a language survey team to come and analyze the dialects and attitudes in the language area.
 - Hosting an Alphabet Development Workshop in their locale.
 - Begin oral translation, telling and/or distribution of Bible stories in their own community.

These numerous commonalities aside, there are also some significant differences between Oral Storying and the Story Producer strategy. These include the following:

- Cost, Training required and sustainable impact

Oral storying typically requires an outsider to train and supervise local people to learn, craft, translate and record each story, one at a time. In a three-week workshop, perhaps 5 or 6 stories can be prepared in the local language. The local storytellers return to their home area to tell and distribute these stories they have prepared. When the story-tellers want to learn more stories, they need to attend another storying workshop. Often, oral story trainers will organize a centralized training venue and invite people from multiple languages to come and prepare stories. These workshops are costly to conduct. In contrast a user can get sufficient training on Story Producer by either watching the embedded training videos, or with three sessions of live online training. Once the local people learn how to use the app, they can prepare as many stories as they have templates for. This can be done on their own time.

They do not need to attend another workshop. In this way the translation, production and distribution of Bible stories is even more locally sustainable, and can be done with no or very little expense. Online training is available on request:

SPapp_info@sil.org

- **Distribution.** Oral storying relies primarily on individual people to distribute the stories. The SP app relies on people and technology such as social media.
- **Illustrations.** Sometimes Oral Storytellers utilize images in various formats (paper, digital, drama) to help them learn or to help them tell and illustrate their stories. The SP app templates are set up with many images to help tell the stories. It is not mandatory that they be utilized, but they are available (by default) if desired.
- **Contextualization.** Some Oral Storying strategies choose stories based on what their culture needs to hear, perhaps even starting with a cultural theme or issue to hook the listener. Orally told stories are often concluded by engaging the audience with questions and discussion about the story, its meaning and applications. The SP app, publishing a rigid, digital video form of the story, focuses more on the story proper. However, there are ways that the SP app encourages contextualization:
 - SP app translators/users are free to make the title slide of the story as captivating as they can create, perhaps utilizing questions, open-ended introductions of a cultural theme or applying an engaging image to be the backdrop of the title slide.
 - At the end of a story, the SP app encourages and enables the end-users to compose and record a song (audio) that is added on after the Bible story is told. This can be accompanied by a photo of the singers or of anything the story producers think is appropriate i.e. perhaps a dramatic pose regarding a cultural issue which the story addresses.
 - As story producers share the Bible story videos, this can lead to engaging viewers in discussions, questions and answers. They can be utilized in group contexts, at church, home devotions, Sunday school, etc.

Comparison with SAB



Image from <https://software.sil.org/scriptureappbuilder/>

SP app: Is it like Scripture app Reader! Actually, no, the Story Producer app is not like Scripture App Builder (SAB) or Scripture App Reader (SAR). SAB is a computer program that enables the operator to build nice [Android] Scripture viewing apps with already published Scripture. The Story Producer does not work with already published Scripture (although already published Scripture, if

available, should certainly be a resource!); it works with the user, from a smartphone, to translate and produce Scripture stories in video form. SP app helps guide the user through the translation process and create a simple slideshow video. It is for creating videos, rather than viewing them.

Conclusion

Do you want to empower people to translate and share Bible stories? Would you like to easily produce Bible story materials in your own language with your own phone? Have you been praying for a vision for how to reach out to diaspora or remote “forgotten” peoples with God’s story in their own language? Are you looking for a free and sustainable way to help the unreached with accurately translated visual Bible stories? Do you want to train Bibleless peoples (those without a whole Bible in their language) to easily and quickly, orally and with accountability build and distribute a digital library of Bible story videos? Do you know of people who struggle with orthography difficulties, multiple dialects and high illiteracy who would still like to hear and know about the God of the Bible? Do you appreciate principles such as: publish early and publish often, translate with accountability, involve the community, go local! work economically, utilize the arts, train faithful people who can train others, and start with sustainability and accessibility in mind? Are you a mission recruiter who would like to connect Western churches with remote people groups in significant short and long term ways for Kingdom purposes? If you answer “yes” to these questions, the Story Producer app might be a helpful tool for you.



Contact SPapp_info@sil.org with questions or feedback

[Story Producer webpage](#)

[Tutorial videos](#)

[Download from Google Playstore](#)

Answering a few other questions

What about backing up technology, syncing data and archiving? The vision for the Story Producer app is to keep the technology as simple as possible for the sake of easy maintenance. Also, to make the technology available offline as much as possible so that it is affordable and fitting for the target end-users who typically do not have access to steady internet. The app can be downloaded from the Google Play store. If you don’t need the context sensitive help windows or the animated tutorial videos, you can side load version 4.2 from a micro SD card or other storage device. Additional stories can be downloaded directly from the app menu.

If an end-user works to produce 3 story videos and then her phone is lost or ruined before she shares the videos, then her work will have to be redone. There is a trade-off to keep the technology simple and inexpensive (offline) versus the complication and expense of backing up every piece of data in the production process. The story units are relatively short, taking perhaps 5-7 hours to

complete the production of a new video, so if work on a story is lost before it is produced, the loss is not extremely significant in terms of time, and for sure, if a story has to be reproduced, the producers will be able to do it more quickly and with better quality the second time around.

We are considering ways to allow the recorded audio to be uploaded to the Bloom Library, both as an archive and as language from which a story can be translated into another local language.

What about analytics? Some amount of analytics are recorded so as to keep track of the number of end-users, production of materials, and quality of end products. This information is useful to make improvements in the technology or training, and to provide statistics to keep funders and management satisfied that it is worth the investment.

Other

1. Story Producer is normally self-taught using the embedded tutorial videos and blue contextual help windows. But online training is available on request: SPapp_info@sil.org
2. The story scripts are easy to translate by users for whom English is not their first language. They avoid difficult lexical and complicated grammatical issues.
3. The process for translating the Bible stories within the app includes both a Community phase, to check for naturalness and clarity, and an Accuracy phase to ensure the translation is accurately conveying the Biblical story. Each page in the Accuracy phase needs to be checked/ticked in order to move to the Drama phase, where the approved translation is recorded by someone with a good storytelling voice.
4. Translation activity logs are available in the Accuracy phase. A log records all the activities from the Learn, Record, and Community phases, and is available for each slide in the Accuracy phase. By reviewing these logs the accuracy checker can see the history of the work done and time spent by the story translators. If, for example, the Learn or Community phase was skipped, the logs will reveal this. The accuracy checker can utilize this information to further train and encourage the story translators to work their way through the entire process in order to get better quality translations. The page-by-page logs record the time and date, as well as each color-coded activity in order for the Learn, Record, and Community phases.

What about key terms? This is a somewhat complex question. Some Biblical key terms are fairly straight-forward in their definition (e.g. temple, disciple, camel, mercy, Jerusalem) and may have a single consistent translation in the receptor language. Other key terms have broader meanings, multiple roles and might require different definitions or semantic terminology depending on the context in which they are used. For example, God, priest, forgiveness, Messiah, grace or salvation. A singular consistent one-to-one correspondence in all contexts is unlikely and should not necessarily be expected. After all, every language is unique and word-for-word translations are rarely meaningful or understandable. For example, think about the many various ways we have to convey

the meaning of “faith” just within our English language: to have confidence in, to lean on, trust, believe, full of conviction, reliance upon, dependence, to expect, assured thinking, assume, etc.

The scripts of the stories used in the SP app are written in a form of English that is easy to translate from.

If the SP app is being used in a context where some Scripture has already been published, the app end-users would be expected to consult those approved Scriptures and make their story translation conform and be consistent with the published Scripture, provided the published Scriptures are meaningful, not too archaic and they were translated with a dynamic and rigorous checking system. Every page in a story comes with a corresponding Scripture reference, making it easy to consult with any Scriptures available in that language. If, however, the SP app stories are being translated in a situation where Scriptures have not yet been translated, then the story translators can dialogue among themselves, review their decisions with the community and any available church leaders, perhaps research what related languages did with a term and eventually come to some conclusions with the help and approval of their accuracy checker.

How long does it take to train and to learn the SP app? With version 5.0 a user can train himself in 1-3 days after watching the embedded tutorial videos and translating 3 stories while being coached by the blue contextual help windows.

In addition to this, you may want training in translation principles from your organization to ensure the stories have been accurately translated.

Contact SPapp_info@sil.org for any questions or feedback

[Story Producer webpage](#)

[Tutorial videos](#)

[Download from Google Playstore](#)