ICT AND LANGUAGE BRIDGE AS TOOLS FOR ACTUALIZATION OF A STABLE DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA

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Abstract
This paper is about ICT and Language Bridge as tools for actualization of a stable democracy in Nigeria. The writer tries to present the role of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and Language Bridge in bringing about smooth and lasting democracy in Nigeria. It is a position paper. He traced the origin of democracy as a system of government from the classical Athens; and what are required of every democratic government. He further looked at the face of democracy in Nigeria. He made it known that there are some factors that militate against pursuit of smooth and lasting democracy in Nigeria; among them are poor record taking and storage devices, language barrier, military coup d’etat, etc. He brings to light the role played and still play by ICT and language bridge in the process of actualization of true and stable democracy in Nigeria. He encourages all heads to be together in the race to see that a true and lasting democracy is practiced in Nigeria.

Introduction
In democracy, when we talk of the government, we talk of the people. So democracy as a system of government from its origin is centered on the people. No wonder Abraham Lincoln gave a working definition of democracy as the government of the people by the people and for the people. It means that the centre of democracy, as a system of government, is the good of the people.

Nigeria, since her political independent on 1st October, 1960 has been making remarkable effort to meet the demands of a true and lasting democracy; but a lot of factors have been militating against actualization of such goal. Some of those factors are lack of adequate record taking and storage system, language barriers, military take-over of government and other vices. Different past governmental regimes had made conspicuous effort to cub these obstacles in order actualize the dream of democracy, but to no avail.

However, in twenty first century, ICT and language bridge contributed a lot in making the dream of true democracy a reality. Changes brought by ICT have changed Nigerian mentality and their way of seeing the world and things in their environment. Language bridge in the same convoy has brought Nigerians together in order to think alike as one Nation.

In the past, different people and persons had researched and wrote about Democracy as a system of government in Nigeria and the ways to make it better, but no one has researched on ICT and language bridge as steps towards actualization of true democracy in Nigeria. That is one of the reasons the researcher proposed to research and deliver this paper as his own contribution to the growth and actualization of a stable democracy in Nigeria.

This paper will look at the origin of democracy as a system of government, democracy in Nigeria and the factors militating against it, contributions of ICT and language-bridge in actualization of True democracy in Nigeria and what to do to get more positive changes.
Concepts

An etymological approach to conceptual problems can be misleading, because words hardly correspond exactly to the concepts which they are meant to express. Besides, concepts and terms that express them have different histories and with passage of time a term may be applied to a concept which originally it has no relation with. Furthermore, from linguistic point of view, concepts are not limited like words, in the sense that a word is limited to a particular language, but concepts may be expressed in different languages. So, it is of great importance to touch some concepts here for the sake of clarity. There are three major concepts in this topic which need to be well understood in order to be able to follow in the presentation. The concepts are democracy, ICT, and Language. So it would not be sufficient to explain them at word level. The relationship of the concepts and the term are very necessary.

Democracy

The concept of democracy cannot be well understood without looking at its etymological definition. It was coined by a 5th century political philosopher, Aristotle. He developed it from two words: demo: people and cratos: to rule. Thus Aristotle defines democracy as the peoples’ rule. This definition arose from the Athenian understanding of demos as the Athenian community gathered in the assembly. So demos in this context means the entire body.

Besides, according to Sartori (1965), Abraham Lincoln borrowed from the definition given by Aristotle. Thus he defines democracy as the government of the people by the people and for the people. This definition flows from his understanding of democracy as a system of government which focuses on the people.

Appadorai (1974) defines democracy as the system of government under which the people exercise their governing power either directly or indirectly through representatives periodically elected by themselves. In this definition it is obvious that democracy centers on the supremacy of the people and not the government. So for him, state can only be democratic if it provides institutions for the expression of the popular will on the bases of social direction and policy. He sees democracy as a human creation whose survival rests upon the freely given consent of the people which subsequently makes them part and parcel of the decision making process.

Schallschneider (1975) defines democracy as the competitive political system in which competing leaders and organizations define the alternatives of public policy in such a way that, the public can participate in the decision making process.

ICT

This is a well known concept from 19th century onwards. It originated out of quest to improve different areas of human endeavours by replacement of analogue system of operation with digital system. The fact is that the ability to use technological tools to assimilate and disseminate information in any field of human endeavour will go a long way to determine the success and effectiveness of that move.

According to Okwudishu and Okwudishu (2005), the term information communications technologies, (ICT) refers to a broad range of activities and equipment including all the tools, applications and information that are available and accessible through computers. It comprises various forms of information delivery system such as televisions, radios, newspapers, books, computers, internet, etc, in one integrated environment.

Murray (2011) sees Information and Communications Technology as an extensional term for information technology (IT) that stresses the role of unified communications and the integration of telecommunications and computers, as well as necessary enterprise software, middleware, storage, and audiovisual systems, that enable users to access, store, transmit and manipulate information. Akarowhe (2017), in his research on how ICT will help in teaching and learning process in the third world countries, views ICT from the same direction. For him, the term ICT is also used to refer to the convergence of audiovisual and telephone networks with computer network through a single cabling or link system. According to him, there are large economic incentives to merge the telephone network with the computer network system using a single unified system of cabling, signal distribution, and management. He
summarized his explanation of ICT by referring to it as an umbrella term for any communication device, encompassing radio, television, cell phones, computer and network hardware, satellite system and so on, as well as the various services and appliance with them such as video conferencing and distance learning.

It has become obvious that different scholars have the same point of view for ICT as gadgets for digital taking and storing of information. Zuppo (2016) made this known. For him, ICT covers any product that will store, retrieve, manipulate, transmit, or receive information electronically in a digital form. For him, they are related to technologies that facilitate the transfer of information and various types of electronically mediated communications.

Language

Everybody encounters language and knows what language is. It is the principal system of communication used by a particular group of human beings within a particular linguistic community of which they may not be members. Essien (2003) defines language as a system of structured vocal symbols by which human beings to make meaning, communicate and interact with each other in a given community. Or simply put, language is a system of rules and principles in which sound, structure and meaning are integrated for communication. This flows from Kelman (1971) who laid down two major principles of an official language. First, it must facilitate patterns of communication such that socio-economic institutions in the country may function effectively. Second, it must make it possible for different groups in the society to have equal opportunities to participate. Besides, Obuasi(2013) defines language as a means of communication and instrument for thought and social identity of a speech community.

Origin of Democracy

Democracy is one of the oldest system of government. According to Grinin (2004), it germinated from the ancient Greek, precisely in the ancient city of Athens in classical antiquity (508-507BC). The word is drawn from Greek words demos “common people” and Kratos “strength”. It means the strength of the common people or peoples rule. So the Athenians established the first democracy. The Athenian democracy had two main characteristics namely, the random selection of ordinary citizens to fill the existing government offices and the legislative assembly, which consisted of all Athenian citizens. So all eligible citizens were allowed to vote in the assembly. However, the benefit of citizenship was tied on the obligation to fight war campaigns. As such, women, slaves, foreigners and non-land owners and men under twenty years of age were not counted as citizens.

From the ancient Greek, democracy as a system of government developed through history and reached many parts of the world. There are many forms of it today.

The basic demands of Democracy

This lies on the features of democracy as a system of government. According to O'Donnell (2005), the important characteristics of democracy are legal equality, political freedom and rule of law. These principles hold that all citizens are equal before the law and have access to legislative process. From the definitions of democracy given by different authors and theorists, the common features of democracy are: majority rule, free and fair elections of representatives, periodic elections, existence of opposition political party/parties, the rule of law, supremacy of the law, equality of the citizens before the law, fundamental human rights, independence of judiciary and freedom of the press.

The Face of Democracy in Nigeria

Before the nation Nigeria was born in 1914, even before the era of African experience of European colonization, Africa in general was known for her democratic nature of governance and decision making, which were mainly based on opinion of the majority. Thus in the words of Okere 2004:5 “Before the white man happened to us, governance was a small scale. But it was more just, more effective, more democratic and limited in scope than we have known ever since.” Okere was referring to the system of government in Nigeria and the entire Africa prior to the advent of the colonial masters. He pointed out
clearly that democratic rule had been in existence before that period. However, this paper is limited to democracy in Nigeria.

**Democracy from Independent in 1960 till date**

Although, Nigeria gained independence from the United Kingdom on 1st October, 1960, the nation retained the British Monarch, Elizabeth 11, as her titular head and Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe of National Council of Nigeria and The Cameroon (NCNC), as the governor general. However, with the adoption of a new constitution in 1963, she became a full republic, independent from UK. So Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe became the first president where Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa of The Nigerian People’s Congress (NPC) became the prime minister. However, the initial joy of the new nation was mixed with sorrow as the infant democracy was faced with a lot of obstacles.

The political unrest of the country in the mid-1960s led to the first military coup d’état which was led by Major Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu and Major Emmanuel Ifeajuna on 15th January, 1966. This coup brought in Major General Johnson Aguiyi-Ironsi who took over the government on 16th January, 1966 as the first head of the Federal Military Government of Nigeria. However, Aguiyi-Ironsi’s government did not last longer, because there was another coup on 29th July, 1966 which led in General Yakubu Gowon. He then established supreme military council. The crisis in this last coup culminated in Nigerian civil war which lasted from 1966 to 1970.

After the civil war, the military government of Gowon continued till July 1975 when he was overthrown in a bloodless coup by General Murtala Mohammed. However, another bloody coup took place in February 1976 taking the life of the then military head of state. With that General Olusegun Obasanjo took over as the military head of state. This lasted till 1st October 1979 when the Supreme Military Council was dissolved and the door was opened for the second republic.

So it was on 1st October, 1979 that democracy surfaced again with Alhaji Shehu Shagari of National Party of Nigeria (NPN) as the executive president. This ended the military government in Nigeria and the start of Nigeria’s second republic. Shagari ruled from 1979 to 1983. On 31st December, 1983, his government was overthrown by another military coup d’etat which led in General Muhammadu Buhari as another military head of state. With that he became the chairman of a new Supreme Military Council of Nigeria and Commander-in-chief of the Armed Forces. However, in August 1985, the government of Buhari was overthrown by General Ibrahim Babangida, who appointed himself the president of the Armed Forces Ruling Council of Nigeria. Babangida’s military government lasted till 1993. He planned to open the door for a peaceful 3rd republic, but because of crisis that arose from 12th June, 1993 presidential election, he terminated his military government on 23rd August, 1993 when he eventually handed over to Chief Ernest Shonekan as the head of the interim national government. That was the short period of the abortive third republic. However, the then minister of defence, General Sani Abacha overthrew Shonekan on 17th November, 1993. This led Nigeria into another military rule. Abacha appointed himself the Chairman of the Provisional Ruling Council of Nigeria. With the death of General Abacha in June 1998, General Abdulsalami Abubaka took over the government and ruled till 29th May, 1999 when he eventually handed over to Chief Olusegun Obasanjo of Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). This brought Nigeria into the Fourth Republic. The Fourth Republic has witnessed the following leaders: Chief Olusegun Obasanjo of PDP 29th May, 1999 to 29th May, 2007; Umaru Musa Yar’Adua 29th May, 2007 to 5th May, 2010. Dr. Goodluck Jonathan 6th May, 2010 to 29th May, 2015. Muhammadu Buhari 29th May, 2015 till date.

Having looked at the nature of Nigerian democracy from independence till now, one can see that there is no smooth flow of democratic rule in Nigeria. So something caused it and there is need to do something in order to curb the problem.

**Factors militating against survival of a true democracy in Nigeria**

As we have seen above, since Nigerian independence on 1st October 1960, democratic government of Nigeria has been sick. One would ask why? A lot of factors have been identified as being responsible for failure of a true democracy in the country. Some of those factors are

- Military take-over of government
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Coup d’etat has been pin-pointed as one of the major obstacle facing struggle for a stable democracy in Africa in general and Nigeria in particular. Tracing the history of Nigerian government since her independent in 1960, Nigeria had passed through four republics, one of which was abortive. This points to the fact that civil rules were sometimes interrupted by military intervention. When such is the case, there will be no free flow of democratic rule in the country leading to unstable democracy.

Language barrier

Nigeria is a multilingual country. There are many ethnic groups in Nigeria and these ethnic groups have their different ethnic languages, each differing strongly from others. This difference in ethnic languages brings about ethnic consciousness. When such is the case, the central government will be weak. This weakness will not give room to a strong democracy. It is true that Nigeria has English language as her national language. It is mainly language of the lettered, serving only at the national level. The non-uniformity in language system reduces the level of communication among the citizen and this reduces unity among the citizens, which in turn leads to tiredness and divided attention in the race for a stable democracy.

Lack of adequate and sophisticated record taking and storage devices

In any democratic set-up, record taking, storage and retrieving are very important. In fact no democratic set-up can survive strongly without these. So Lack of adequate record taking and storage devices is a serious factor that weakens the national democratic system of Nigeria. In the past, especially before the era of ICT, the country used analogue method of taking, storing and retrieving of information especially political information. Unfortunately, these devices could be easily manipulated. As such, there was a clear set back on the race towards achieving a stable democracy in Nigeria.

ICT in other fields of human activities

The data gathered by the researcher show that ICT has been of great help in improving other sectors of human activities namely, security, health, commerce and industry etc. It is good to touch some of these areas in order to prove how effective ICT will be in pursuing a stable and true democracy in Nigeria.

In security, ICT cameras are now in use in different places like homes, offices and even market places in order to keep watch round the places involved. The images captured by these cameras are stored and can be retrieved at any moment when the need arises.

Besides, electronic tomb-prints and capturing are now used to identify individuals in procurement of official documents like drivers’ license, international passport, National Identification card, etc. This ICT system of record taking and storage makes for efficiency and accuracy in identifying individuals who are needed to be properly identified, and to keep and retrieve every piece of information at any point in time without any form of error.

Furthermore, ICT is of great help in commerce and industry. Before the era of ICT, commerce and industry brought about much stress on people who took part in them. For example, one needed to carry one physical goods or another from one place to another in order to advertise and sell the goods. But today, with the help of ICT, goods can be advertised in internet websites, television channels and radio stations. This makes it easier and faster. In banking industry, people used to carry huge physical sum of money moving from one distance place to another, giving room to risk. But today ICT has brought about different online money transfer in such a way that one can stay in a place and transfer huge sum of money, to different people in different destinations, with ease.
In addition, ICT has been of immense help in health sector. As a result of ICT, there has been an immeasurable amount of progress in the area of human health in different parts of the world. Different forms of machines designed for different health purposes are being manufactured on daily bases in order to meet up with different health challenges facing the world today.

Besides, ICT has been of great help in human communication. This has to do with both written and oral communications. Before the era of ICT, communication was not all that easy to compare to how it is now. In those days, letter writing and dispatching of mails took a lot of time because of delay being encountered at different places. But now, through e-mailing, huge and bulk mails can be forwarded to different persons in seconds. Besides, oral communication was not possible without face to face encounter. But with help of ICT, telephone communication makes it easy for one to save energy and time to communicate with another person in a distance place with ease.

These points gave evidence to how importance of ICT is in many fields of human activities. They are signs that ICT has come to help in solving the problems in different fields of life. As such, politics should not be an exception. So it can be of great help in establishing a stable democracy in Nigeria.

**ICT and Language Bridge as the saving agents of the drowning Democracy in Nigeria**

Looking as the factors militating against survival of democracy as a system of government in Nigeria, one can see that lack of adequate record taking and storage system and language barriers are prominent factors. Besides, there has been evidence of great role played by ICT in other fields of human activities. There is need to pay attention to the role it plays in politics and see how it can help in bringing about a stable democracy in Nigeria.

**ICT**

ICT has played a serious role in the move for actualization of a true and stable democracy in Nigeria. Emeka-Nwobia (2008) remarked that the current concern of ICT user is how to effectively utilize ICT potentials in educational, socio-cultural, infrastructure, geographical, economic and political development. One of the factors militating against smooth and stable democracy in Nigeria is poor record taking and storage devices. This has led to manipulation of figures and other information by corrupt political leaders and agitators. Because of this undemocratic attitude, the masses have lost hope in their leaders leading to political apathy on the side of the citizens. This made the government of Nigeria government of the few.

Now ICT happens to be the most advanced and sophisticated means of communication and record taking and storage device. It involves record taking, storage, management, transmission, retrieval and assessing of information in its various forms through technological device. Thus manipulation of election procedures and other forms of election rigging which were recorded in the past when analogue system was in use are now reduced to its barest minimum. With ICT, registration of voters and conduction of elections are now easy and safe; because in the past, registration of voters and tomb-printing were done manually. This practice gave room for massive malpractices like double or even triple registration of voters took place because there was no machine to detect them. Today the existence of ICT has made it possible for electronic registration and tomb-printing. Thus any double registration or voting could be easily detected.

Besides, with the presence of ICT, communication gap is reduced in the sense that people are now closer to each other in terms of communication than they were when analogue system of communication like letter writing and fax messages were in ultimate use. People rig elections or commit any other form of political crime and escape because security agents could not be easily reached because of poor communication facilities. But today, mobile telephone and other sophisticated communication and crime detection devices are in used. Fast and easy communication helps to draw people’s mind to the demands of democracy and the need to embrace democratic system of government. These help to establish a lasting democracy in Nigeria.

In addition, ICT helps basically to grant access to information and knowledge which would have been impossible to access. Knowledge is power. Some people criticize and fight those in authority because of ignorance. Access to information which is made available by ICT has gone a long way to facilitate
stable democracy in Nigeria, because since people are fed with correct information about the good things happening in the corridors of power, they would be in a better position to support democratic government than when they talk and criticize those in power out of ignorance. These are the benefits mad available by ICT.

Munzali (2005) avers that ICT offers great opportunities for survival and strengthening of our indigenous languages. This is done by creation of language specific websites. These websites help in bridging the gap between one language and another, because people outside any linguistic environment can have access to the languages beside their mother tongue. Today different elections in Nigeria ranging for the presidential election to election to other government posts are being challenged in the court is as a result of the dividend of ICT. Unlike before the era of ICT when people manipulate the election results and publish fake and still be sworn in into office they never merited. Today with the help of ICT such political crime perpetrators no longer find it easy.

Language Bridge

The reality of people’s existence depends largely on their language. As Obuasi (2013) stated that language is directly linked to identity, because through language, meaning, information and understanding of the self and the community occur. Social reality depends on the language and linguistic behaviour of a given society. The people’s behaviour, ideologies and culture are realized, mainly, in language. That is to say that man is formed and shaped by his linguistic experiences and values. As such, language is very important in any democratic set-up. That is why Elugbe (1990) says that the role of language in national development can be seen in the same light as the seed which a farmer puts into the ground in planting season. The more he puts it into the ground, the more he expects great harvest. What he means here is that the more Nigeria as a nation eliminates her language problem, the more she turns out into a better society.

It is obvious that among the major factors that militate against stable democracy in Nigeria is language barrier. This is because communication and correct information are among the necessary ingredients of democratic system of government. Free flow of human communication is very necessary in any democratic set-up. Nigeria is a multi language nation. It is true that she has English language as her national language, there are many ethnic languages; and these ethnic groups pay much attention to their different languages in such a way that English language, which suppose to be a unifying language, now becomes language of the lettered. It means that it unites only the educated citizens. Thus making the government of Nigeria government of the few educated. This is a big challenge to Nigeria as a democratic nation.

Right from the birth of the nation, Nigeria, in 1914 through her independent in 1960, there had been a remarkable evidence of language barrier among different ethnic groups. However, towards the tail end of 20th Century and the beginning of 21st Century, it has come to the knowledge of Nigerian citizens, that there is need to bridge the language gap among different ethnic groups in Nigeria. This will go a long way to help in communication flow which in turn will help to unite the citizens in the race to get a stable democracy in the country. ICT has helped a lot in the process of language-bridge. Different Nigerian ethnic languages can now be recorded in digital format and can be posted on internet through some dedicated websites to be shared by the people of other ethnic groups or even with other peoples of the world. This effort has yielded a lot of dividend to prove that language bridge is a serious tool for actualization of a stable democracy in Nigeria. A careful observer would agree with me that the last military take-over of government happened last in Nigeria in 20th century, precisely in 1999. From 21st Century, there has been a remarkable improvement on the nature of democracy in Nigeria. Different ethnic languages are not meant only for the native owners of the language. People from other ethnic groups now have access to other languages apart from their mother tongue.

Furthermore, Jibril (2005) gave evidence of language bridge among the ethnic groups of Nigeria in 21st century. There exist now bilingual dictionaries which are accessible through the net. Such dictionary as online dictionary of English-Igbo-Yoruba-Housa-Pidgen English containing more than 29,000 words posted on the website of the Nigerian Computer Society (http://www.nigeriancomputersociety.com). Fonts of Nigerian ethnic languages are now available in nets. As such to type some of Nigerian languages now in
soft is possible unlike it was before the era of ICT. This development has given boost to Nigerian languages being among the languages of letter.

In addition, the government of Nigeria has recognized the need to give attention to Nigerian indigenous languages for proper unity of the nation. In politics today, the ethnic languages are now used as public languages. They are used to address the assembly and in writing national documents. Some of the federal documents especially as it concerns politics are now written in English language and in other ethnic languages especially Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba languages. Even the present Nigerian currency bears the figure in the three languages. This is to manifest that the move towards Language Bridge is serious in Nigeria. This positive attitude towards language bridge will give rise to national consciousness of the citizen, which will in turn give birth to a stable democracy in Nigeria.

Way Forward

Today is younger than yesterday, but tomorrow is still in the womb. Let us not look at the mistakes of the past in order not to regret more; and let us not equally wait for the future. All hands must be on the deck to utilize the benefits of ICT and language bridge and do all we can to reap the dividend of democracy. Having seen that stable democracy in Nigeria is in war with some factors, and having seen the contributions of ICT and language bridge in tackling these factors, more efforts should be put in place to see that there is continuity in the fight to achieve victory on the side of stable democracy in Nigeria.

There are still traces of manipulations on the ICT devices in order to perpetrate political crimes. Government should make more effort to import more crime detection machines to reduce the rate of crime in the country. On the same note people should be educated on the use of internet facilities. The present problem facing ICT in Nigeria is that many people are still ignorance of how to operate ICT machines. This will retard the movement towards actualization of a stable democracy in Nigeria.

Besides, even though English language is the national language of the country, any official document should be translated into different ethnic languages in order to give room to unlettered citizens to take full part in any national matter. This, will help to bridge gaps in communication and encourage active participation of the masses in national decision making process.

Furthermore, government should make effort to establish and encourage the study of local languages in primary, secondary and tertiary institutions. This program will allow people to study languages outside their indigenous ethnic languages and have good knowledge of it. This will help to bridge the language barriers among different ethnic groups in Nigeria and boost the use of local languages. When this is the case, ethnic consciousness will reduce and attention will be at the centre. When the general attention is at the centre, a stable democracy would be assured.

In addition, since democracy involves people’s participation in government, ICT should be modified to be able to accommodate local language orthography. This will help in the full participation of local citizens in the politics of the country. So information on local languages could be easily be taken, stored and retrieved with ease.

Conclusion

The researcher has succeeded in proving the fact that ICT and language bridge are of great importance in the race to establish a stable democracy in Nigeria. It was observed that prior to the era of ICT, Nigeria had a limping democratic system of government. But right from the 21st century, being the heart of the talk about ICT, the face of Nigerian democracy changed to the better. Besides, barrier among the ethnic languages of Nigeria reduced to its barest minimum. The gaps among the local languages have been bridged. This made the citizens lose sight of ethnic consciousness and focus their attention on the centre. All these gave boost to the pursuit of a stable democracy in Nigeria. However, we should not relax. We should put in more efforts to see that a true and stable democracy is finally built in Nigeria.
References


