Observation notes 9th March week one

there are at least 4/5 languages used in the office between people members of staff on a regular basis for all kinds of situations: casual talk most of the time and business meetings one to one the languages that are used in the office or English for all email communication and some talk between people whose first language is not French or Dutch there are also a number of other language which is Italian rarely used Polish not used yet French used quite often for small talk but also for outside calls for example today a journalist called the office and both the office coordinator and director spoke to him her on the phone in French the policy is probably made on the basis of what works and who can cannot speak my first language so far it is very much elf English as a lingua franca if I look at the internal communication both within the office and probably not 100% sure intra network. Possibly, there are other languages, especially the coordinator for southern Europe he could be using other languages than English for intra network communication. If it happens that English is used 100% there is not much else going on in terms of languages then language policy then maybe focus on English as a lingua franca or strategies rather than policies., I have quite a lot of access to information how they do an produce the info the info etc.

Observation notes 10th of March 2015 meeting day

the day started with a general meeting where everyone introduced themselves. Everything was conducted in English, but more languages are added on to the resources. The staff are highly multilingual speaking at least 2 languages, 3 languages are the norm. It may be also due to the fact that Brussels the environment/ context is highly multilingual and multicultural. I found out that there are more email list to which I will be added and will have access to an email list where there is a dialogue between CAN Europe and its members. It may be useful to contact dragana as she has contacts with the Balkans and the way she works with the members from the Balkans. Will be very useful to work with speaker five to have an insight into intra network communication. Other policy coordinators also contact the relevant policy members about particular policies. The members when receiver position letter at cetera. Translated within their own resource is if needed et cetera tomorrow I will send an email to everyone about my project information and approach people on one to one basis and speak to them about being part of the study signing consent forms for observations etc.

11th of March 2015

Speaker 6 will be very important to observe and interview as speaker six seems to be aware of many, if not all, issues / things in the office including languages, I think sets some rules for example today someone called and he asked the person about his her language skills: English, Dutch, French sufficient level to make yourself understandable.

I have now insight into how email lists are organised I have full access to the main email list. All the information is in English in the emails there are many English native speakers in the communication email exchange. I was thinking of internal and external members plus people; the emails are mainly about info sharing this is the core for the network to prosper. I will have to think about categories plus different personalised questions for interviews.

This will give me more background to what languages people use et cetera. There are considerably long moments of silence when people work. If I look at intra network communication what can I observe? Emails would be the main part of data, but they are only in English and the spoken interactions are more interesting and multilingual. Speaker 2 has already agreed to take part in my project and that is going to be very interesting as the speaker deals with southern Eastern Europe and speaks the languages the language with them not English.

12 of March 2015

I managed to have some forms consents signed.

The languages that are used in the office are mainly the ones I described earlier I need to focus on the language policy literature to be able to define any frameworks that would be applicable to the settings. How languages work seems to be very pragmatic; things seem very much focused on the information exchange, very specific and goal oriented (no wasting time) type of environment. On the other note, people are very cooperative, nice, happy to help etc. It's nice to work in such relaxed atmosphere. People don't seem to care too much or be somehow uncomfortable with me being there. They treat me as part of the team; with so many interns that come and go they (the staff) are not behaving in a way that, they either play or try to be secretive. In general, there is a lot of work going on, it's quite work absorbed atmosphere hands sometimes there are some silent gaps/ moments. Also the environment is very multicultural/ multilingual: 5 belgium's, two Italians, two Polish, one Spanish, one Greek, one Serbian , one finish one Irish. I will be involved in the general assembly work as well, I will be attending talks with members of the network (28th to 29th April)

13th of March 2015

In general I decided on a primary plan for my observations and for the time being I have identified three main areas of interest with subsections in each.

1. Office work : business talk (staff 1:to:1 meetings of staff working on the same project); b) meetings (general update meetings for the members of staff from the office); c) casual talk between staff;

2, intra network communication: a) meetings outside office this one will depend on the logistics and if people will be willing to read and ask questions about my project may be problematic from the ethics perspective. B) Meetings with member organisations (General Assembly) emails plus telephone.

3. Outside communication (journalists NGOs that are interested in cooperating and politicians)

can office multilingual communication English 100% so far members at least bilingual native language plus English for general communication intra network

Today I had a quiet and informative talk with the director who introduced me to some concepts such as the idea that Belgium is generally divided be cause of the two different languages and very much divided as far as culture is concerned. This is also very interesting to dig into a little bit because the environment will probably have some influence over at least peoples skills languages

16th of March 2015

There is a very good mixture of languages being used. Unfortunately, I am still not able to record as I need three more people to sign the forms for me. I started to think of a place where I could possibly have placed my recorder. I was sitting at [lorenzo] place and I was with my back to everything that was going on. This was the worst place to observe any interactions. I've noticed, however, a lot of code switching, for example, the secretary was talking to the finance coordinator in English, but then they started to joke about one French person a policy coordinator and they all started speaking French; when the joke finished, the secretary and the finance coordinator switched back to English. Also, when the director moves from his desk and goes to a meeting at cetera there is more talk between policy officers. They suddenly start talking more. There is a lot of categories and people already know what rules apply in the office for example that is, when addressing particular people come up stuff already knows which language is best to be used (often it's English as a lingua franca for non native speaker to non native speaker), but not always. There is a lot of code switching even if both interlocutors share one language for example, speaker six and speak of five mixed English and Dutch. People are generally very comfortable and flexible to use different languages.

17th of March 2015 meeting day

(notes from my supervisor : “note down as much as you can at the moment and what happens in these meetings and how people interact. Compare how people interact in different settings”).

there was a meeting concerning a policy issue, position of CAN Europe to be addressed and agreed within the network. A survey will be distributed among the members (probably in English as the person who prepared it is a native speaker of English and German but it probably won't have a German version). I started recording as I have all of the ethics signed there are more and more languages used within the office but for the purpose of intra network communication that is German, Italian, Dutch, French, Polish but English still dominates “floor”.

18th of March 2015

Speaker 5 spoke to Catherine in English (non-native speaker to native speaker) and walking back to his desk

19th March 2015

People are very much livelier today. I started recording the office communication – I placed the recording device in the middle of the office. Matthias on the phone in English. Staff usually pick up the phone in English.

There is a lot of document production that is based on research materials from different sources. A lot of the resources that are used for this practice are originally English (some of the sources come form news and media agencies, research agencies based in Brussels). It would be interesting to find out, if staff uses their languages to get information from different regions of the EU. Also, do they use publications from member organizations who already translated the info into English 9 or any other language that happens to be within the staff at the Secretariat’s internal capacity – people's knowledge of other languages since the staff is highly multilingual).

Reinhilde picked up the phone in English and then asked @Parlez-voud Francais? Or Netherlanden? And then switched to French.

24th March 2015

There was the weekly staff meeting and one of the staff members siad that there is a lady for the maternity cover of one of the staff members and the person described the prospective member of staff: ‘she’s French and she has good English. The necessary languages are French for the admin staff and English for the rest.

3rd April 2015

Matthias asked about translation into different languages – version of the map with facts of the coal use across the European countries – members states. The Communication’s team came up with the idea of map facts and consulted policy officers who work on coal phase out in the office. The meeting was help in English; no NS were present. There was no mention of who would work on the translations, the assumption was that staff at the office could do part translations. M: ‘ if it is local people who are going to be involved then it is a good idea to translate the website [map] into at least the general story level’? Others agreed, but did not really dwell on this and moved onto the taking ciritical data from the local members and putting it into international coal context – the interactive map : local stories on coal, financial streams to show numbers and other data. There seems to be little interest in languages with respect to this project and other projects as well. (Update: 30th April: the map is live – only English version is provided with no other language version – not even planned to translate.)

Random parts of conversations:

‘S4: We have certain habits and you use them. For instance, I’d never speak French with Cinda

But you both speak French natively, so why is that?

S4: We never spoke French with one another only English”.

‘S5: I never speak Irish with SX, I only speak English. Sx, do you speak Irish?

SX: Yes, quite well’ and she then goes on to describe how things work in Ireland in connection to English.

‘S8: Well, I work in an English environment’ reference to the office – the Secretariat.

S6:’Let’s hope that people who receive it [a document produced by the office – not sure who and what kind of document they are talking about] are not English speakers@’

People are generally interested in languages – on a personal level; and how they work. Many staff, especially S8 and S4 learn at least few words in different languages and greet staff in their native languages;

There is some translation being performed by staff; SX usually performs translations from Serbian to English ; I was asked to double check the English version for any grammatical, stylistic or other mistakes. It would be useful to ask about the process of hiring people – English is usually stated on job posts. But for specific policy areas or for specific work within a particular region of Europe (e.g. the Balkans) were they looking for someone who speaks the language of the Balkans? Would they assume that they could not communicate in English in that region?

S6 meant the office is an English environment – but there are a lot of different languages used on a daily basis – English is the language used by many, but mostly by NNS.

4th April

Communications meeting: there was communication’s group meeting. One of the questions that I asked during the meeting, which was mainly devoted to how to get member organizations to respond to info that the staff at the Secretariat is sending. What purpose do the matrials sent by the Secretariat is for the members – what can they do with it? : they are able to circulate the materials to other NGOs that might be interested, but are not members of CAN and therefore may not have heard of the info; they can reuse the info in their publications, online or otherwise; they may reuse materials in campaigns or other projects, they may also engage the public by using info form the materials, they may translate and contextualise the info into their own countries.

7th April 2015

A native speaker of English and German practice: morning meeting in English and then spent all afternoon in German, setting up work in Berlin office – this is in preparation to move coal phase out programme of CAN E. to Germany -Berlin Office. This generally illustrates the daily activities of multilingual staff working in the office. This is an example of a native speaker of both English and German – the speaker was brought up by bilingual parents (German and American) and that is why speaks the two languages and makes frequent use of the two languages at work.

Different languages are used for the purpose of intra-network communication – usually the big languages such as French, German – possibly because of the wider environment Brussels. In general, the Brussels based NGOs that are part of the network cooperate in English but may at times pass on relevant documents in other languages, French or German. English dominates the communication.

What kind of questions could I ask at the interviews? - possibly role of English(?) And how people feel about the fact that it is English for the majority of communication in the network and office?  
On the member organizations – are they anyhow prepared or required or introduced to the LP of the network?

So far the office is more multilingual than I assumed first. But the network communication is mainly English. People seem to be happy about using different languages that work for them in order to achieve their goals – communication (effectiveness of communication guides the choice of English).

Mondays and Tuesdays almost everyone in the office.

An Intern uses a lot of Italian in his contacts – phone, and written communication.

Language practices, ideologies and management: there seems not to be too much of management visible; everyone seems to be talking in the language that seems to provide them with their means/goals (communicate successfully). They may want to have their papers (for publication) checked but that’s about it. Is the English langauge and no translation of the website materials an indication of management? Possibly not as nobody tries to alter the behaviour of the member organizations – also visible on the email communication and intra-network communication.

The exchange of info seems to be the crucial part of the network. It thrives on exchange of info among the members and the secretariat – especially on the supranational level- this may also be the case for bigger national/regional organizations – but speaking of CAN e. specifically this is the case.

1. People tend to use English (for both NS and NNS and NNS and NNS) interactions
2. People tend to use their L1 with other of the same L1 only when speaking to themselves (in L1 group)
3. There is a lot of code-switching
4. Ppl already know the context well and know what ‘rules’ apply in what situation. There is a lot of learning by observation what others do – especially visible among the new staff who come and some of them get confused as to what language to use, especially with the Belgian staff (French/Dutch speakers).
5. People often describe their practices as habits that formed at some point in the past and stayed like that. S4 and S6 in particular mention this a lot.
6. The existing e-mai llists – to which I have access to (I am subscribed internally to) operate in English only and the member organizations that reply to emails – usually representatives of NGOs from Brussels or Western EU countries; usually these are the same people that are frequently visible in these email lists. Not many people from Southern or Eastern replying to the emails; they are generally less visible in the emails.

8th April

The office was quiet as there were not many people in – most of them worked from home. However, after work I walked with one of the members of staff and we had a conversation about languages and his/her experience with languages. We talked about how language(s) in general are rarely noticed by staff in the work of the office, but how s/he feels it is one of the most important aspects of all of the activities that they – as an organization perform. ‘I think we rarely think about languages in our work, that is something we only notice when we have problems getting information across’. For example, I know there were people form Southern part of Europe, from Italy who we cooperated with. And the communication did not go. And it is these moments that you start to think, what else can I do’.

This would be interesting to explore in interviews: how do the staff at the secretariat level manage the diverse (from language perspective) audience, especially when NGOs they cooperate with do not have sufficient English for communication.

April 12th 2015

Website quotes:

‘Can Europe is Europe’s largest coalition working on climate and energy issues. With over 120 member organizations in more than 25 European countries, CAN E. works to prevent dangeroud climate change and promote sustainable climate and energy policy in Europe’ (last accessed 12th April, 2015, at 10.34 am)

‘Today CAN E. has over 120 member organizations in more than 25 European countries. The wider and better informed group we are, the stronger our voice!’ (last accessed 12th April, 2015 at 10.43 am)

English is used for info sharing and gathering and contacting with member organisations in most cases. However, other langauge are also used for some of these purposes. There is a positive attitude towards the use of other languages – people are positive about different langauges being used in the office – Brussels Secretariat. Due to the fact that Europe is diverse linguistically English is used as the main medium of communication - S5‘how else would we function?’ English is essential for CAN E. but so are other languages to a lesser extent.

13/04/2015

Lunch informal talk

S6: ‘ he has a habit of whenever there is a Dutch speaking person around, he speaks Dutch, it doesn’t matter if the rest doesn’t speak Dutch@’

28 April 2015

GA in the Brussels Office building – Mundo B. The agenda introduction and talks/presentations that followed (update) were all in English. There are about 90 people present all of whom are representatives of their organizations; very multilingual and multicultural event. I was generally involved in coordinating, helping to prepare and sitting in talks/ presentations. The majority of people are not NS of English; the ones who gave presentations were only 3 were NS. All formal talks/ presentations were conducted in English only. At lunch breaks there were variety of languages French nad Dutch among the most frequently used ones. I met most of the participants in the GA who were active in email lists – they were the representatives of their organizations.

29Aptil 2015

Day 2 of the GA.

Again all formal talks were presented in English: there were again main formal talks followed by split into groups talks depending on the topic. These were followed by informal talks in the hall of the Mundo-B building where the GA was held. During those talks one of the participants from Sweden (with good English skills) expressed his worry that he was notable to understand a lot of the jargon and abbreviations that were used in the talks in the past two days.

One of the participants of the GA said in an informal conversation: ‘I find the language very technical and all these abbreviations@ I felt that each time I heard abbreviations or technical words I had to note them down. It is like learning new words again!’

Although English was used for all the formal talks s/he struggled to follow some of the talks because of the jargon or abbreviations of specific programmes (EU ot UN ones) or policies at the EU level concerning environmental topics such as climate change (CC), use of land and climate change (LULUCF) etc.

30April 2015

Today is the last day of the General Assembly. There are a lot of abbreviations and very technical language – very heavy policy related language – usually EU policy e.g. EU ETS, LULUCF, INDC, EIB, G20– these are the only ones I understood, but in general the talks/presentations are heavy on this type of language. After the main introductory talks, some from the staff from the secretariat and some from member organizations the rest of the day was spent in separate rooms discussing topic specific issues – mostly led by the members of Secretariat S7, Urlika, Ania and S4.

Lunch break informal talks: many of them happened in English, but the majority of the talks were in different languages, French, Dutch, German were the most frequently used, but there were other languages, Polish, Serbian (or one of the Serbo-Croatian languages) used.   
I engaged in a conversation with one of the staff from member organization that works predominantly in Brussels, but has its member organizations scattered across the EU, but mostly outreaching the Eastern part of the EU, but the organization’s outreach activities spread towards the Eastern Europe. The organization had a meeting as to what languages and translation into what languages to provide. In order to reach the audience in the Eastern European organization and cooperate with them, the organization decided to translate their documents with information and ready-made products (in the form of bulletins, newsletters and other policy statement documents, op-eds etc) the languages chosen were, apart from English: Polish, German, Lithuanian (on the way). The choice was mainly dictated by the most strategic (for the organization) members/ prospective members. The decision to provide translations was to cooperate closer with the organizations in these countries – because they are the main areas of work of that organization. When asked why, the member of staff from that organizations said: ‘it’s better to use the language of the person/organization, because it makes the info to be absorbed better’.

May 2015

Staff meeting:

People share info so that everyone is updated and update on the work among the staff working in the Secretariat office. Each person updates on what he/she achieved that week and what s/he is working on. Everyone takes turn. Everything is in English. There are 2 native speakers and 10 NNs of English plus the researcher. English is used in all the staff meetings, but there are some translations from other languages, particularly S5 often makes jokes by translating Dutch or French jokes to English. Sometimes these jokes are only understood by Dutch or French speakers as they are the only ones who laugh. People seem to be comfortable with the English language being used for the meetings.

Outside of the meeting: two people talk in Dutch, one speaks Turkish on the phone and one person speaks Polish. After the Polish person finishes his/her conversation on the phone, another person makes a comment: SX: I like when you speak Polish, you change your voice, it’s nice’.

05.05.2015

Activities meeting: follow up session.

Some CAN E. organizations mentioned the challenge of getting members cooperate in workgroups, the challenge being that not all organizations see the point, or feel motivated to cooperate and devote time to workgroups that sometimes have the goal different to the organization’s priorities.

‘J: Well, in general, there’s er I know a bit on organizational design, and when you are a real network organization and having a working group actually limits your flexibility and such organization looks better, but the organization in practice, er it just takes away your flexibility and also makes your organization more exclusive and enclosed and slows down your, er limits your agility as an org. And from what I assume from my limited time here is that you have to move fast, especially in the campaigning and communications area’

‘W: the concept of the proposal is based on the fact that [ proposal to get members working together - to include member organizations and give them more of a leading role, for them to be more proactive in convening conference calls, producing articles etc.] many of our (.) members still fail to see CAN E. as a network, but see CAN E as an organization that is of course a (unintelligible) the case here in Brussels; CAN Europe is considered as another organization next to WWF and Greenpeace etc but is also very much the case among our members outside of Brussels who call in to our meetings to see what we say but they are not necessarily considering what we are doing is actually what they are doing that is one and the same, that’s and so the idea is that, there are two rather different approaches. ! Is the approach that happens in CAN International that not many of our member know where you have membership who take active ownership of working groups that are designed and decided by the members because CAN Int does not have additional 12 members of staff who can actually support the working groups. And there’s CAN Europe where it is the staff who does everything in terms of organization’

‘S5: Sometimes it is nice to use your own language for once even if you’re talking about work, it takes your mind off’.

On the staff meeting concerning follow up from the GA, there were discussions about what to do to make the individual members more responsive – this impact the info exchange across the network. Generally the organizations take what is being said and many of them do not take active participation beyond that. Brussels NGOs are well informed on Brussels matters but beyond that there is not much active participation. The NGOs at national levels (individual member states) seem not to share actively what is being done and what CAN E can help with.

General findings form the observations

* English is the most popular language in the office
* English is predominantly used in the email communication with the member organizations
* English is the language of CAN E.’s social media – website, twitter, Facebook.
* English is used for all the staff meetings
* English is used in the official meetings, discussions, presentations and conferences at the General Assemblies
* Everyone assumes that English is the language in this context (CAN E. specifically, but some people also mention that English is the language of the NGO sector)
* The assumption of the position of English is based on the practice – people see what is being done and accept it as it is. Many people, in the informal talks refer to English as the ‘tool for efficient communication’ especially within the network;
* CAN E. does not have a written language policy that would state the language of communication; it is implicit
* Other languages are often used for work related tasks – communication with members/ prospective members, regional updates (Balkans or Turkey);
* The constellation of members of staff dictates which languages will be used the most/least in the office on a daily basis; at times Dutch dominates the office, especially when there are no staff who don’t speak Dutch at all present in the office (especially S3, S2).
* There are members of staff who use their languages for work related tasks (phone conversations) (Greek, Turkish, Finnish, Serbian, Polish);
* There are certain members of staff who always communicate with other members of staff ‘bubbles’ in one particular language, or two languages: Reinhilde and Wendel – Dutch; W and JF French, English, sometimes Dutch; C and W – English, W. and E Dutch, J and W – Dutch rarely English, M and C French and E
* Multilinguals who communicate in English only in the office, but who often use their other language(s) in the network:
  + S2, S3, S1, S7, S9, SX
* There is no rule set for communication in English or any other language in the CAN E. Charter or Statute;
* Application pack for prospective member organizations (in English only version) it is ‘expected’ of new /prospective members to:
* 1. have at least one person subscribed to the main (at least) email list – reading emails regularly; 2. share relevant information on the respective email list(s); 3. comment on information and policy discussions where relevant; 4 respect common positions.
* People seem to be comfortable in this multilingual environment (Secretariat office)
* Even though all of the materials being in English 9Secretariat level) often the process of creating the materials relies heavily on other languages, e.g., communication op-eds/articles for the website – the staff uses their languages to gather information, to contact relevant member organizations for more nuanced info, articles/ correspondence in other languages – usually the L1 of the person who works, but also different version of the same document but in two languages, e.g. an official website of a governmental institution may publish two languages but the versions would differ – there would be less nuanced info in the English version than in Polish – or any other language. Comms person who participated in my project stated that there was once a situation that a member organization contacted him/her stating that there was such a discrepancy in the version of a crucial document and that the English version lacked the nuanced info which would skew the perspective on that issue for speakers of English only. I am not sure what happened next because I was not there when this happened.

06/05/2015

‘L: WHat is the word for this in French? (seller tape)

W: we call it plank (Dutch) but what it is in French?

E: What do we call it in French? (turns to speak Dutch) E: replies in Dutch

L: We call it Scotch in Italian

W: We don’t speak French, huh? @

W, E and L @@@

W: We only speak Dutch@

L: I know Flemish people don’t speak French

W: We speak Dutch!

W, E and L @@@’

The interaction took place in the office between W and E who are Belgians from the Dutch part – north of the country and L who is Italian and was an intern at that time. What is interesting about this fragment is the playfulness of the speakers and the fact that they W and E stick to the values – despite both W and E speak French, W is a native speaker of French and E speaks French but is not native, they both subscribe (here humorously) to the value that is attached to Dutch among the Flemish part of Belgium. There is the general rejection of the French and their language in this part of the country and people tend to have strong positive attachment to their language – Dutch. The Walloon part of the country, on the other hand, is French speaking and has attachment to the French language, both groups are said not to ‘like’ each other, but more in a humorous sense. L is Italian but also fluent French and English speaker and turns to the speakers that are fluent in French for ‘help’. As the interaction evolved, it turned out that L was not able to get what s/he wanted, because the two were not willing to jokingly to admit they speak French and therefore know the word for seller tape in French.