
2.1 Introduction

The low hum of conversation in the crowded Paris airport lounge was broken by the sound of the intercom. The speaker's voice instructed passengers to make their way to the gate for the Singapore flight. First the announcement was made in English, then in French, and passengers from around the room one by one rose to their feet. One woman with jet-black hair and wearing a smart, gray business suit laughed into her mobile phone. She spoke softly and quickly in Spanish, and then walked purposefully down the lounge hallway toward the gate, already making another call. Another man sat intently looking into his laptop screen, while two younger women next to him talked quietly to one another. From the kiosk a tall man wearing a long, floor-length robe turned around with the newest Financial Times in his hand. He strode quickly down the hallway towards the gate. Out of the corner of the room a young mother struggling with two toddlers adjusted the strap of her child stroller, and then headed down the hall with one child in the stroller, and holding the other's hand. She passed three teenagers who were completely absorbed in their music, which fortunately was only audible through their headphones.

Does this scene seem familiar to you? Can you recognize yourself in any of these roles? To be sure, not all of these people in the airport are involved in intercultural business, but as you can quickly see, it is still possible to compare these individuals to one another. For example, they could be sub-grouped by age, gender, social class, or ethnicity. More important to our purpose here, however, is to determine **what they have in common**.

What do all these people in this airport lounge have in common? Is there a thread that connects them all, regardless of their culture of origin? The answer is, of course, yes. First, they are all traveling somewhere. This unites them in the common bond of being direction-oriented. Second, they are using rather modern methods of travel, as opposed to culturally-specific ones. Third, there is an unspoken sense of behavioral rules in an airport lounge. Normally, one doesn't talk much to strangers around him or her. Striking up a conversation with the person next to you is possible, but

doesn't always happen. People often seem to exist in a rather individualized world as they travel the planet.

A further point in common is the attention to the announcer. Most times announcements will be made in English, as well as at least one of the languages of the airport host country. This simply means that the chance of passengers knowing some English is high. Another parallel is the passengers' dependence upon technology. Mobile phones, i-Phones, laptops, i-Pads, various music players, etc. are not simply common anymore—these are expected and used continually in our globalized world. How many of these items do you carry with you, especially when traveling? Technology has allowed us to stay connected with one another even over large distances and time gaps.

Importantly, a major connection between all these people is that they all find themselves equal in terms of their surroundings. That is, no one passenger is truly an indigenous member of the airport; in this sense, **each person finds themselves in a situation that is not their original context.**

There are a few important implications that we can draw from these observations. First of all, although some of the individuals were traveling for business reasons and some for personal reasons, they still share quite a few characteristics. Secondly, individualized cultural norms and trends can be superseded by more universal ones in certain contexts. Specifically, **many specific cultural traits might not be visible on the 'surface' level of behavior in globalized environments.** For example, although we were able to make quite a few comparisons between the passengers in the airport lounge, there are many details and variables of their lives and cultures that remain unseen. This of course might seem self-evident, but it helps us to better recognize the shared norms that the passengers have. Furthermore, such shared behaviors are apparent enough and frequent enough to constitute a group of globally shared and expected norms.

This collective sharing of behavioral traits we will call **metaculture. Metaculture is made up of the behavior that we share globally, and often forms an external, surface layer of behavior visible to the general public.** Because it is a shared group of norms, we can even conceptualize it as a culture: a culture of globalization (see, for example, Tomlinson 1999; Niezen 2004).¹ Such as Fig. 2.1 are telling because they describe just how widespread certain globalized behaviors have become.

The term metaculture provides us with a convenient tool to look at how people act out their lives within the globalized context—whether they are in a business situation or a private one. It also helps us to define certain traits or values that take on a more universal acceptance. However, since globalization increases our exposure and experiences with others, along with exposure to their norms and practices, the dynamics of our interaction with one another will also change. This means that metaculture, by its very nature, **is constantly being redefined** (consider, for example, the music or fashion industry).

¹ Much has been written about globalization and its effects on culture, but relatively few researchers have actually identified this level of shared behavior as its own distinct culture, or 'cultura franca'.

Fig. 2.1 Globalized travel—part of the metaculture. (Moll 2011)



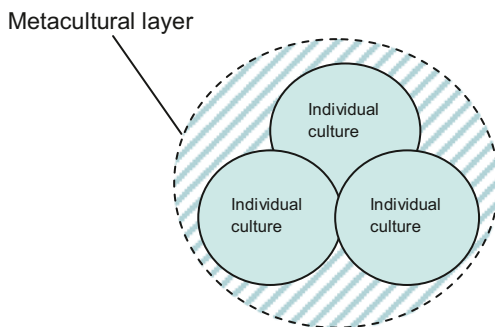
In very real ways, the process of globalization has spread many common practices across the surface level of societies. For example, our concept of what the media means today may be very different from what it meant a decade ago, or even a few years ago. Internet journalism, prevalent with the process of globalization, has changed how and when we receive information. When we turn on the television, often the images of newscasters are familiar to us no matter where in the world they are. Styles of news reporting share similarities, especially live reports and interviews. In fact, a recent article in the *Jerusalem Post* describes the increasing trend of readers becoming viewers (‘Why read it when you can watch it?’).

The spread of shared behaviors by no means indicates that cultures have lost their individuality; rather the ensuing metacultural layer might be seen as a direct result of the continuing process of globalization. In other words, because people tend to share certain practices globally, and because these practices have often spread throughout our world, we have come to expect them more and more. For example, we often simply assume that a request for a proposal or a bid will follow generally accepted guidelines. Some contracts are written in international formats, and banking procedures are often similar around the world. This means that certain practices have become both accepted and expected around many parts of the world. Figure 2.2 provides a visual explanation of how a metacultural layer might look.

Underneath this layer of shared practices, there remains a vast richness of norms and expectations. This means that the behavior on the surface may or may not match an individual’s original cultural norms, but the individual has been influenced by globalization to the extent that she or he shares some behaviors with most other people. In our example of the airport lounge, everyone shared at least the practice of using modern methods of transportation. They also probably shared a lingua franca (English), even if they could speak French.

Well, you might say, since people share globally accepted ways of interacting, why should I need to read another book on the diversity of cultural practice? Remember the iceberg model we talked about earlier? Notice that the majority of cultural mass was found underneath the visible surface of interaction. Some

Fig. 2.2 Visualizing the metaculture. (Moll 2011)



researchers argue that interculturalists only teach people to be good deep-sea divers; we explore only the sub-surface differences among cultures. They recommend what is needed is more attention to shared practices, whether these be in business or otherwise. Others dismiss the metacultural layer, suggesting that such global practices mislead people into generalizations. We believe that analysis of **both** levels is important to have a strong understanding of how intercultural interaction works.

What does all this have to do with intercultural business communication? Good question. In fact, understanding the metaculture is essential in being able to identify where and how some interactions go wrong, and being able to analyze the relevant reasons. Because some behaviors or actions exist interculturally, you tend to focus on such shared norms. The danger of losing or lowering our perspectives of different cultural dimension thus increases. If you think that everyone acts within the level of the metaculture all the time, you will find yourself surprised. You cannot simply assume that shared practices will be accepted by everyone, or will be practiced all the time. For example, shaking hands is one behavior that is often found in the metaculture—but not without exception. Even though it may seem natural to you to shake hands with both men and women in a negotiation, in some cultural contexts this behavior might communicate the opposite of what you are trying to achieve.

One important point in defining a metaculture is that **the shared behavior will not be equally distributed**. In other words, some regions happen to share more norms or behaviors than others do. Obviously, some cultures adopt change faster than others, so most of the time we can trace the spread of the metaculture to time factors. More remote or isolated cultural contexts that showed little similarities with other cultures a decade ago might now display a striking number of shared norms. Furthermore, many of the behaviors that we see in a metaculture are often (though not always) Western cultural patterns that have been spread globally through various media. Globalization has created a unique framework through which we often see our experiences. In other words, as we saw above, the whole notion of culture and globalization implies a ‘paradoxical pact’ where differences are actually the binding feature of a positive relationship.

2.2 Our Objectives in This Chapter

In order to understand the quintessence of intercultural business communication, we have to understand the context in which our interactions take place. Therefore, our purpose in this chapter is to highlight what we believe are the essential causes leading to the global metaculture, with special attention to what possible advantages as well as pitfalls or dangers metaculture brings to our interactions. We will look at least four factors that in our view have led to a metacultural level: technology, migration patterns, shared lingua franca, and multicultural generations. You will notice that each of these contributing factors is directly or indirectly linked with international business patterns. Again, we find it to be rather circular: the more business contact we have with one another, the more migration happens or multicultural generations occur, for example. Obviously, not all of our interactions are tied to business contexts, but the process of both globalization and post-globalization are arguably tied to economic advances.

2.3 Technology: We are Connected!

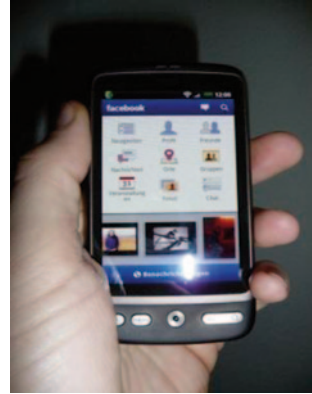
How is technology important to the development of a metacultural layer of behavior? The answer is obvious to us in the 21st century: the explosion of technology has led to increased and frequent contact between and among cultures, regardless of time, geographical or political boundaries. Being in constant contact allows people to learn about one another both directly and indirectly. Marshall McLuhan envisioned such a scenario in his notion of the global village. Remember, the global village is the idea that people are connected to one another via technology, no matter how remote or isolated their culture generally is.

One way to portray just what this means is to compare the following statistics of cultural usage of the internet. Now for some of us, usage of the internet is just as much a part of our lives as eating and drinking. In fact, like Fig. 2.3 indicates, we have the ability to access immediate information right in the palm of one hand. However, this has not always been the case around the globe. Clearly the increase of internet usage has been most importantly felt in non-Western cultures over the last few years. One study measured in December of 2009 reports that while internet usage in North America increased 140 % and the EU growth increased by 240 % over the course of the study, the Middle East showed a surge of 1,675 %, and the African continent came in at a whopping 1,810 %! (internetworldstats.com).

The impact of technology on our societies has been enormous. Just one example of how fast technology develops is evident in something that most of us own—computers:

Today, computers are assisting in the development of new innovations, significantly speeding up the development process. New advances in technology are rendering computers of a year ago obsolete. No sooner is a computer model manufactured than the next one has rolled off the design presses, and no end is in sight. Computer designers are now moving

Fig. 2.3 A connected world at our fingertips. (Moll 2011)



beyond silicon chips to using DNA chips ... a move from geologic roots to biologic roots, making the computer an even closer representation of man. (www.idecorp.com)

Furthermore, the advances of technology have radically changed the domains of medicine, scientific research, space programs, telecommunications, the entertainment industry, etc. Developing technology simply makes life easier for many people. DNA testing, forensic science, biometrics (the science of digitalizing information), banking, financing, advances in alternative forms of fuel, and various advances in fiber optics are some of the many examples where we can see how technology has changed how we live—not only in a specific culture, but globally. In other words, we now have the world right at our fingertips!

The whole process is rather circular. Technological advances have allowed the spread of globalization. In turn, globalization has more widely distributed new technologies.

Technology and globalization go hand-in-hand. Globalization unleashes technology, which in turn drives firms to plan production and sales on a global basis. Technology changes the work we do and in nearly all cases, the jobs created by it demand more education and training. It also changes the way business operates by transforming relationships between suppliers, producers, retailers and customers. (Ross 1993:13)

Of course, there are disadvantages to globalized technology, as well as presuppositions and dangers, and we shall address these issues later on. For now, let's turn our attention to some of the more evident ways in which technology has connected us.

2.3.1 Our Wireless World

Advances in technology have done much to change the way we live and communicate over the past quarter century, but no breakthrough has revolutionized life as much as the advent of the “wireless world,” according to a panel of experts assembled by CNN to pick the top 25 (“Top technological advances”).

We are mesmerized, it seems, by screens. The media plays one of the single most important roles in both spreading and advancing technology. Information is now available instantly, not just quickly, and most regions of our planet are connected via the Internet. One area that technology and the media have transformed is with news and newscasters. No longer are we dependent on a certain hour for television headlines and news to retrieve important information. In fact, a new form of journalism has taken shape even in the last few years: **participatory journalism**. This type of reporting is not subject to the same constraints that traditional news media might have been. For example, traditional broadcast media was based on a few reporting to many listeners/watchers. Now, individuals can instantly film, photograph, or record important global events and upload these immediately onto the internet, so that we have **many reporting to many**, and in almost real-time parameters.

New communication technology, including accessible online publishing software and evolving mobile device technology, means that citizens have the potential to observe and report more immediately than traditional media outlets do. Swarms of amateur online journalists are putting this technology to use, on open publishing sites such as Indymedia and on countless weblogs, adding a grassroots dimension to the media landscape. Bloggers and other amateur journalists are scooping mainstream news outlets as well as pointing out errors in mainstream articles, while people who've been made subjects of news articles are responding online, posting supplementary information to provide context and counterpoints. Increasingly, the public is turning to online sources for news, reflecting growing trust in alternative media. (depts.washington.edu)

Even mainstream news broadcasters search out blogs and various uploaded amateur reports for new leads and up-to-date information. CNN, for example, runs a program called iReport, and this program is designed to allow ordinary citizens from around the world to upload breaking news and information. Most of the time, such reports are unedited and uncensored, and often include short videos or images from on-site reports. One example of a venue that has made this information exchange possible is YouTube. YouTube describes itself as **a place for people to broadcast themselves** (Fig. 2.4).²

The effects of such a contact venue cannot be overstated: with one click we can both hear and see current, real-life details about people and situations around the world. Steve Jones, professor in the Department of Communication and associate dean of Liberal Arts and Sciences at the University of Illinois at Chicago, describes the importance of YouTube:

It's probably safe to say that, over time, as this generation of high school and college students gets older, they will be quite open to getting what we would consider television content via YouTube, and they would probably be comfortable getting other kinds of content via YouTube. So in that respect, I think YouTube has begun the process of moving video to IP-based distribution, independent of traditional or cable networks. (cited in Margolis 2008)

² According to Mashable, the Social Media Guide, currently the website has a viewing of about two billion video views per day—highlighting the enormous interest in more personal, real-time reports that are accessible to the general public.

Fig. 2.4 Digital trends in a globalized world. (digital-trends.com)



In addition to reporting and news availability, technology has had an enormous effect on spreading cultural information and norms through advertising, education, and of course, entertainment. Whether Hollywood, Bollywood, or Dollywood, the entertainment industry is broadcast globally and has affected cultural trends worldwide. Information is not only accessible; it can be frozen in time to repeat over and over, which enhances the educational effects. First videos, then DVD's, and now BluRay® provide ways to maintain information over the constraints of space and time.

Technological advances have thus provided us with very real ways of spreading cultural information and norms in major segments. Music, fashion, religion, politics, various lifestyles, and of course language are all examples of cultural elements that are shared or available in most parts of the world. For example, consider one segment of the fashion industry: blue jeans. Who isn't familiar with blue jeans? What was a late 1900s invention has become a global fashion, and this is largely due to the advertising aspects of mass media. In terms of lifestyle choices, non-canonical relationship patterns such as interracial marriages or homosexuality are now much more a part of global cultural patterns than even a few decades ago. Of course, this doesn't mean these relationship patterns are globally accepted, but it does highlight the effects of increased contact with people who are different from one another.

Another area that has been affected by increased contact is language. Whether in formal education, various forms of music, or the entertainment world, language is constantly changing and grammaticalizing new forms or jargon.³ Since the lingua franca (in our current era—English) is shared by many cultures, it is logical that large amounts of these new forms will spread, ultimately cementing their usage around the world.

³ To take one example, over the past decade the phrase “bring someone to justice” has been used repeatedly to describe the goal of the so-called war on terror. This phrase has been used by many world leaders and in public speeches and symbolizes the arrest, incarceration, or even possible death of wanted individuals.

Fig. 2.5 Global attention to the environment. (mitchell-phillipsdesign.com)



2.3.2 Dynamic Nature of the Metaculture

Technological advances highlight the dynamic nature of a metaculture. Fashion, music, movies, political policies, business practices, etc. are constantly changing or adapting to generational preferences. This means that the surface metacultural level of shared norms will also change. What people choose to do or value can fluctuate depending on what is the newest, up-to-date, or currently popular social behavior. For example, consider the top ten lists in the entertainment industry. Movies and music shape both behavior as well as fashion, and we can see how the metacultural level of shared norms is directly tied to what's on a current top ten list.

World events are also a force for the dynamic or changing nature of a metaculture. Recent emphasis on terror networks and the fight against them have radically changed how we experience travel. Security norms have evolved dramatically over the last decade, and passengers are far more used to stringent checks and searches than they were before. No matter which airport you find yourself in, for example, you expect to be closely examined from head to toe by the security personnel before being allowed on a flight.

Positive environmental protection factors have also received a boost from the spread of technology. Because of mass media, global attention has been turned towards important environmental developments and dangers, such as described in Fig. 2.5. More environmentally sensitive ideas such as fuel alternatives are

beginning to nudge major gas guzzlers off of our roads. Bio products can be found in many supermarkets, or ordered online to be delivered directly to the consumer. Technology makes it easy to track attention to environmental care, immediate response to environmental disasters, and a progressive interest in both human and animal rights. In some cases, the progress is slow, but because of increased contact such protection is advancing daily.

In sum, the explosion of technology has indeed created a global village. Contact created as a result of such a virtual village has greatly helped the spread and change of a surface-level of cultural behavior. These shared patterns constitute a real, dynamic level of culture that is noticeable globally.

2.4 Migration: Spreading Behaviors

Another major component of the developing metaculture is the effects and consequences of migration patterns. **Migration**, or the moving of people from region to region, is due to varying reasons. In this section, we will examine at least three main causes for human migration, and the impact that this has had on the development of a metaculture.

At least two factors make people change their regional location: **push** and **pull** factors. Push factors are undesirable or unfavorable conditions that force people to leave an area and live somewhere else. Typical push factors could be war, politics, severe weather conditions or events (earthquakes, etc.), or some type of persecution (religious, ethnic, political, etc.). On the other hand, pull factors are those conditions that make it favorable to move somewhere, such as the economy, stronger job markets, stable (safer) weather patterns, political or religious freedom, etc.

2.4.1 Politics

Politics has played and continues to play a role in why people move. Wars, regional or ethnic divisions, oppressive regimes, and persecution have created thousands of refugees and sub-communities, at times even involving an entire culture (for example the slaughter of the Tutsi minority of Rwanda in 1994, or the dispersion of Bosnians and Serbs in the former Yugoslavia).

Let's look at some concrete examples of political migration and its effects on the metaculture. During the Vietnam conflict, many political refugees left their home culture and migrated to various parts of Western Europe and North America. With them, they brought their now famous style of excellent cuisine and hospitality, but they also gained a great many Western norms in terms of fashion, language, and higher education opportunities. The mutual exchange of ideas resulting from these contacts has added dimensions to our metaculture by synergizing Southeastern Asian and Western cultures.

Another example of migration due to politics involves the former Eastern European countries. Here the cultural differences might have seemed somewhat smaller, as many European countries share behavioral similarities. But the influx of immigrants into Western European countries brought with it valuable skills as well as flexibility. While some argue that the effects on the job market are negative, other empirical studies show little or no influence of immigration on wages and unemployment rates (Branchflower 2007). The spread of people across the continent, however, brings with it closer interpersonal contacts and exposure to widely accepted popular behaviors. What this means is that our metaculture is susceptible to outside influences that shape and redefine its parameters constantly, but also that the metaculture itself forms individuals coming into its sphere of influence. In other words, there is a cyclical relationship between the metaculture and what influences it.

2.4.2 Economy

Patterns of settlement are also tied to a current regional economic status. Simply put, people tend to go where the jobs are. For some, it is a choice, but for others, a requirement for survival. The promise of higher living standards and secure jobs is enough to move people who otherwise might not have migrated. The global recession of the last few years has had an enormous impact on certain cultures, especially those in developing countries.

During 2008 and 2009 the global economy was rocked by soaring food and fuel prices, the collapse of global financial markets, and a severe contraction in world economic demand. Global economic growth declined from 5.2 % in 2007 to a forecast—1.1 % in 2009. The crisis also caused a significant change in the prospects of developing countries. Economic growth in developing countries in 2009 is projected to be 1.7 %. This is substantially lower than the observed growth rate of 8.3 % in 2007. (ausaid.gov.au)

Some companies try to deal with economic downturns using restructuring processes. In many ways, restructuring only enforces the metaculture, since accepted practices are globally recognized and adopted. Some are even subject to international laws, which are intended to apply across cultures. Other companies have branched out to less chartered cultures in a bid to reduce costs and increase productivity (Fig. 2.6).

In the last few decades, we have seen enormous growth rates in certain areas of the world. For example, many people are finding attractive opportunities in various cities of the United Arab Emirates. Jobs in areas such as business development, product development, pharmaceuticals, and highly sophisticated software development are usually among the most appealing. Other geographical regions that have displayed migratory worker growth in the last few years are Australia, India, and Southeast Asia. Many European countries, such as France, Spain, Italy, Germany, England, and Switzerland, have experienced large influxes of migrants in search of better jobs and better standards of living.

Fig. 2.6 Foreign business investment in Africa. (entrepreneurnewsonline.com)



During the 19th and early 20th centuries, urbanization resulted from and contributed to industrialization. New job opportunities in the cities motivated the mass movement of surplus population away from the countryside. At the same time, migrants provided cheap, plentiful labor for the emerging factories. Today, due to movements such as globalization, the circumstances are similar in developing countries. Here the concentration of investments in cities attracts large numbers of migrants looking for employment, thereby creating a large surplus labor force, which keeps wages low. This situation is attractive to foreign investment companies from developed countries who can produce goods for far less than if the goods were produced where wages are higher. (globalchange.umich.edu)

2.4.3 Growing Communities

Solar energy and environmentally friendly communities, low taxes, modern living services and standards, and increasing know-how to draw upon are just some of the perks offered by new and developing communities. Their goal is to attract the intellectual power and productivity required to turn their region into a thriving, profitable international hub. One campaign boasts being the third reformer in the world for business practices, with attractive investment incentives and ranking 32 of 183 economies in 2010 Ease of Doing Business. Furthermore, the EBRD reports that in 2011 Macedonia will most likely have the highest economic growth in comparison to all countries in the Western Balkans (investinmacedonia.com).

Another major example of the migration across and among cultures can be seen in the European Union. Citizens of the EU now have the opportunity to work, live, and study in any member of the Union. This has the effect of blurring the lines between borders and cultures, and increasing the spread (and sometimes transfer) of norms, values, and expectations throughout Europe. Especially on the geographical border areas one can find the influence of one culture spilling over into another. For example, the 'Dreiländereck' (literally, *three country corner*) of Southern Germany, France, and Switzerland hosts a multitude of different cultures and sub-cultures,

and people tend to speak both French and some form of German on both sides of the border. Cross-border shopping occurs regularly, and although Switzerland is not an official member of the EU this area plays a pivotal role in the economic strength of the whole region.

This kind of population interchange both brings and takes change around the globe. People are introduced to new sounds, new thoughts, new fashions, and new processes. The result is that people are exposed to many single elements of culture or behavioral patterns that they may or may not have been to before. Such patterns and behaviors constitute the ongoing, dynamic level of the metaculture. For example, as we noted above, the fashion element of blue jeans is now soundly spread across the globe. What began as a rather small, regional labor-designed trouser eventually became an integrated part of our metacultural expectations in global fashion.

The sort of contact that creates a surface metacultural level of behaviors and norms heightens our general cultural awareness. In addition, the factors involving technology not only speed up the spread, but also allow ideas to become more lasting and grow roots. Importantly, the process of globalization has become so important that a strong awareness of cultural norms and how these operate **is required** for successful interactions in our current world. In summary, the spreading of behavioral patterns through migration is one very important factor in constructing, maintaining, and strengthening the growing evidence of a metaculture.

2.5 Sharing A Code: Our Lingua Franca

Think again about the airport lounge scene we described earlier. One of the major factors uniting all the waiting passengers was their exposure to English. In fact, some researchers estimate that **only one out of every four English users is a native speaker of that language** (Crystal 2003; Seidlhofer 2004). This means that there are three times as many English users as there are native speakers! Using a shared code allows people to communicate with one another among and throughout cultures. Historically, the world has shared a variety of codes; some of the most prominent are Greek and Latin. English is the current lingua franca, and although it is not the only shared code, it is one of the most widely used and accepted.

When people share a code for communicating with one another, we call this code a **lingua franca**. A lingua franca is defined as that **language or construction of a language that is shared for some purpose of intercultural contact (commerce, politics, religion, education, etc.) by people who have different mother tongues**. The development of a lingua franca is also cyclical in that it influences but is also influenced by the peoples that use it:

The term “lingua franca” originated in Mediterranean ports in the Middle Ages among traders of different language backgrounds. In order to carry on the business of trade, they spoke a common “patchwork” language consisting of bits of Italian mixed with Greek, French, Spanish, and Arabic words. Some of those words are still part of ordinary conversation

today—in modern English. Nearly every language on Earth has contributed to the development of English. Languages of the Indian subcontinent provided words such as pundit, shampoo, pajamas, and juggernaut. From the Spanish are several words that came to define the spirit of the American “wild west:” mustang, canyon, ranch, stampede, and vigilante are a few examples. English has adopted literally hundreds of words from Arabic and Persian. Though some filtered down through other languages, these words that evoke images from American culture have Arabic origins: tariff, sugar, hazard, jar, almanac, shrub, alcove, alfalfa, syrup, and spinach. Long is the list of words and expressions that came to English from “foreign languages.” (globalenvision.org)

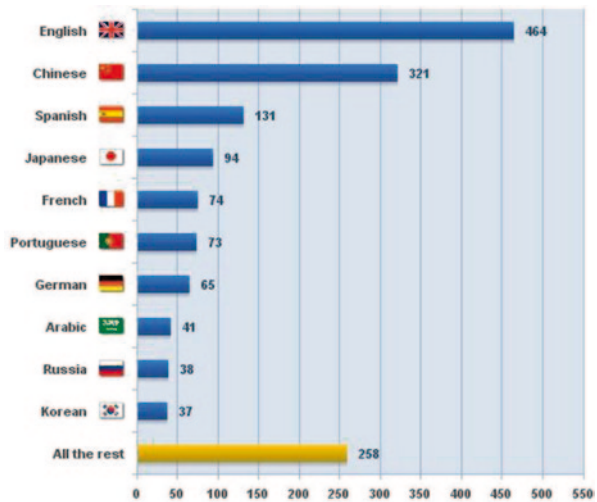
There are, of course, many varieties of English, and you might have noticed that pronunciation can make a difference in how well you understand someone else. Still, the basic grammatical patterns and lexicon are shared so that some (even if limited) form of communication can occur. Not only is English spread verbally, it is importantly one of the most written languages. Journals, newspapers, textbooks, treaties, and many forms of entertainment (movies, music, etc.) are written in English. One thing that unites many people is the popular music lyrics of their own generation. In fact, some artists gained global recognition by writing in English, and some non-English countries broadcast English entertainment and programming regularly (for example in the Netherlands).

Nowhere has the importance of English taken such root as in schooling systems. Students are trained to use English, and in many countries this training begins at the earliest schooling age. It is assumed that a communicatively competent person will be able to speak and understand at least some level of English globally, which implies that English is the language of business interactions. Many international jobs require English as a basic necessity to even apply for a position. This does not mean that usage of English is proficiently similar globally, but it does mean that most people with access to technology assume they can at least in part communicate with one another in English. In fact, some international industries, such as aviation, require a certain proficiency in English to provide safe and effective travel to people from around the world.

2.5.1 Internet English

Because English has become such an integral part of the internet, it has solidified its position as the globally shared code. What this means is that as English has extended the use of the internet, in turn the internet has proliferated the use of English. Some researchers argue that there is, in fact, no universally acceptable internet language, but the vast majority of users do use it, and to not know English can dramatically isolate someone from information sources. You yourself have probably had a good amount of experience with using English on the internet—regardless of what your native language happens to be. Furthermore, the internet audience size is much larger for English, so even the spreading of cultural traits and information has a stronger chance of diffusion if the material is written in English. See Fig. 2.7 for a breakdown of popular internet languages.

Fig. 2.7 Internet languages.
(witiger.com)



Overall, the Internet provides an excellent platform to read, learn, and use English as a lingua franca. While we agree that maintaining cultural and linguistic distinctives is a critical part of our social identities, we nevertheless recognize the importance of being able to share a code for the spread of information.

Of course, there are those who might argue that only a quarter of the web-users are native English speakers, but this misses the point. The main advantage of the lingua franca is that people share the code, regardless of their own native languages. This means that communication and thus information transfer is possible. Ultimately, a strong lingua franca is a critical element to constructing and maintaining the metaculture, especially when it is used in long-lasting, written form.

2.5.2 Shared Symbols and Signs

One important aspect to sharing a global code is the increase and recognition of symbols or signs carrying specific meaning. One organization has compiled the following list of well-recognized symbols which appear globally. You will probably be familiar with most if not all of these symbols (Fig. 2.8).

This particular group of signs is relevant to and for “the crossroads of modern life”—in airports and other transportation hubs and at large international events. This is one way of meeting the need for quick, effective communication globally and can be considered as an integral part of the lingua franca.

Obviously, some signs are regionally and culturally bound, but there are symbols that are recognized globally. This in turn leads to increased contact and sharing of information—the key component to a metaculture. How many times have you gone through a train station or an airport and searched for an automatic bank

Fig. 2.8 International symbols. (iamtheweather.com)



machine? Or perhaps you needed medical assistance—chances are that most of us have encountered metacultural signs everywhere.

2.5.3 The Effects of Sharing A Code of Meaning

Certain questions come up when dealing with a lingua franca. First of all, does it matter which language the lingua franca is? In fact, there is **nothing special** about English as a language itself—it's not necessarily easier, less complicated, etc. It simply happens to be the one language of commerce that politics (or, as some would say, history) have put into place (at least for the current time). But, as we have seen, it also **helps very much as a global mode of communication**—it makes things quite convenient for us, especially with regard to internet, our lives are much less complicated with one language or shared code of understanding.

Why does it have to be English? **It doesn't**, of course, but for the moment, that is what we use. It might be rather complex to switch now, but of course history will write its own story. In addition to English, Fig. 2.7 shows us that Spanish and Chinese are also widely spoken, and these could be potential candidates for a future lingua franca.

The second, and much more important question is whether cultural norms still matter even if we are all sharing the same code? Absolutely. Most of the time, communication involves some type of **person to person contact**, and both **literal and non-literal** components (body language, gesture, non-verbal communication, etc.). Some might additionally suggest that a **prerequisite for successful interaction is respect and mutual tolerance**. This, of course, is absolutely correct, although perhaps a bit idealistic. Ideally, people should mutually respect and tolerate one another, but, in practice, this is not always the case. If it were, there might not be

such an emphasis on heightening our awareness of intercultural interaction and culturally specific communication norms.

In summary, one of the most important effects of sharing a code is the ability to transfer complex ideas, such as those that build economic, political, and educational movements. A shared code is the lifeline of the marketing and advertising industry. Researchers can share data, and thus come to more rounded conclusions. Schools can standardize tests, both nationally and internationally. Even the entertainment industry relies heavily on a shared lingua franca. And of course, a global code virtually guarantees multicultural participation in the communication process.

2.6 Raising Multicultural Generations

There is a fourth major component that is responsible for the development of our current metaculture. This component has to do with the number of people in constant contact with other cultures, and the resulting multicultural generations that have been raised. This has happened for a number of reasons. For one thing, many countries that share borders often blur the cultural distinctions at such borders. As we mentioned above, the *Dreiländereck* is just such a geographical location. Where countries meet politically, so do cultures and lifestyles, and the contact that ensues is one reason that many of the inhabitants in these regions tend to be more multicultural. The same principle applies to many places around the globe; for example, Southeast Asia is a conglomeration of multiple societies and their practices. In the United States, Texas, Arizona, California, and Florida often portray road signs in both Spanish and English, an indication of the different cultures represented in the population.⁴

Not only does multiculturalism occur along borders, it also occurs **within** a region. In some places where multiple ethnic populations are present, it is common to hear children fluent in a few language variants besides that of their parents. So, for example, many people from Macedonia can also communicate quite proficiently in Serbian, Croatian, Bulgarian, and possibly even Greek. This type of contact is termed **intracultural**, and deals with exchanges between different represented peoples within a political border. Variations in behavior often occur directionally within a country, so that Northern France is quite different from Southern France, and Bavaria boasts its own subculture within Germany, to take a few examples.

⁴ Of course, this principle does not imply that contact will be viewed as positive, or mutually beneficial. Many Spanish-speaking members of the Southwestern US complain of various levels of discrimination, and such is the case in a wide variety of border-sharing areas (take, for example, Israel-Palestine, Turkey-Syria, Pakistan-India as a sample).

2.6.1 Third Culture Kids (TCKs)

Multicultural people can be raised as such based on the career choices (voluntary or forced) of their parents. Society is replete with people who have grown up in a country or region that is not that of either of their parents. In fact, some people have experienced more than a few major moves in their lives—across and among continents. There are both advantages and challenges to this type of lifestyle, but the fact remains that these individuals are often exposed to much more cultural variation than others, and the influences they learn as they move from place to place are also carried and spread with them.

These global nomads, or **third culture kids** (TCKs) tend to share more with other TCKs than with members of their own parents' culture. TCKs are defined as individuals who have “spent a significant part of his or her developmental years outside the parents' culture. The TCK builds relationships to all of the cultures, while not having full ownership in any. Although elements from each culture are assimilated into the TCKs life experience, the sense of belonging is in relationship to others of the same background” (Pollack and Van Reken 1999).

TCKs spend a portion of their formative years in a culture or cultures that are not their parents, and many times choose to continue this lifestyle by making career choices involving travel. Often they are open to new ideas, interact fairly well with most people, and do not identify with one single culture (Pollock and Van Reken 1999; Pascoe 2006). The social identity of a TCK is hard to pinpoint, since they tend towards some elements of each of the cultures they have experienced.

Henry R. Luce (1898–1967) is an example of such a TCK. Born to American missionaries living in China, he studied at both Chinese and British schools, and then went on to study at Yale. His personality has been described as slightly socially awkward but highly ambitious, and Luce is best known for his journalism style—short, succinct articles with pictures to appeal to busy, on-the-go people. He founded the well-known Time magazine, and dramatically changed how people received print media in the 19th century (Brinkley 2010). Luce brought with him an appreciation for cultural variety that shaped how he built the Time Inc. empire and how media developed both in the United States and around the world. In very real ways, he changed the way people perceive the government, as well as expanding media coverage from regional to global.

Other influential TCKs include North Korean leader Kim Jung Il, actor Keanu Reeves, singer Engelbert Humperdinck, and Viggo Mortensen (*Lord of the Rings*). Many politicians, including Madeleine Albright, Dominique de Villepin, and Barack Obama also grew up in multiple cultures, and thus carry this influence with them in their public lives and policies.

2.6.2 Effects of TCKs on the Metaculture

It would be impossible to compile a complete list of all the effects multicultural people have had on the metacultural level of behavior. In many ways, the spread

of information through and by such global nomads has played an intricate role in solidifying certain societal practices globally. Coupled with the explosion of technology, heavy migration patterns, and a shared linguistic code, multicultural people are **culture carriers**, and expose large portions of the global population to certain cultural norms and expectations. Because of this exposure, social and economic practices are not only practiced, but to some extent expected around the world. It is this level of behavior that makes up our global metaculture.

Certainly such an idea is not immune to challenges. Many would argue that the vast majority of metacultural norms tend towards Western expectations (although such a claim can be subject to interpretation). This is most likely a result of several factors, including the directionality of technological change. Furthermore, one trap is to assume that because there are similarities in behavior on the surface, differences in cultural approaches, expectations, and practices are minimized. The rest of this book will focus on showing why this assumption is both misleading and dangerous to our own intercultural interactions.

2.7 Summary

At the beginning of this chapter, we noted the basic paradox of metacultural interaction and cultural diversity. We believe that to comprehend this paradox fully, you have to have a good understanding of both levels of cultural interaction. In describing the metaculture and how it operates, we hope to provide you with the necessary framework through which to approach and improve your own future interactions. Furthermore, it is important to understand that while the metaculture represents surface similarities in cultural actions, there is a danger that we can be fooled into thinking that deeper factors, such as cultural values and beliefs, will likewise be the same globally.

In sum, four major factors that have contributed to the development of a globalized culture include technology, migration patterns, a shared language or lingua franca, and the increase of multicultural generations. Most importantly, we have to remember that just as societies and cultures are susceptible to generational change, so the metacultural level is dynamic. Simply put, the more outside influence on the metaculture, the more possibilities it has to change and to adapt to incoming information. Our task is to heighten our own awareness of what it means to be communicatively competent in a globalized world, how similar behaviors can carry different meanings, and learn how to react accordingly. To that end, we now move into the multi-faceted, colorful world of cultural variation.