

RUSSIAN



How to Approach Customer Support

Tips for achieving better translations and respecting cultural norms

Introduction

Global businesses today serve a diverse set of customers who speak different languages, come from different countries and regions, and have different cultural contexts.

Every one of the more than 6,900 distinct languages spoken around the world is unique, and cultural nuances can vary widely. It's important to understand these factors when providing customer service. Communicating in the customer's native language and behaving in culturally appropriate ways help develop and nurture trust. This is why any customer-centric business should strive to build cross-cultural competency into their customer service organization.

To help you achieve this, Unbabel has put together a series of language guides. Our goal is to provide a helpful and illuminating context in an easy-to-digest format. In this guide, we'll cover the Russian language.



About the Russian language

Russian is one of the three main languages remaining within the East Slavic sub-family, emerging as a distinct dialect in the late Middle Ages. East Slavic was the same as “Old Russian,” the structure for modern-day Belarusian, Russian, and Ukrainian. Russian is the official language of Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan. Approximately 258 million people speak Russian, making it the eighth most spoken language in the world. It’s also

considered an official lingua franca in Ukraine and many former Soviet countries, including Azerbaijan, Estonia, Georgia, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. There is also a notable contingent of Russian speakers in China, Cyprus, Finland, Israel, Hungary, Mongolia, Poland, and the United States.



There are about 200,000 words in the Russian language, compared to more than one million in English. Unlike the Romance languages to the west, Russian is distinct in both sound and structure. Whereas many European dialects are based on Latin, Russian is unique and has twice as many vowels and some extra consonants.

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Core concepts in Russian culture relevant to customer service

VALUES

Russian culture places a great emphasis on patriotism, traditionalism, and family values. They tend to align themselves with companies that not only understand their culture and values but share them, too. Russians believe the world view surrounding their culture is misconstrued and will be pleasantly surprised by those who educate themselves and exemplify similar values.

SKEPTICISM AND CONSERVATISM

Russians value realistic thinking and avoid being overly optimistic, too pushy, or unable to see difficulties ahead and those who behave that way. Conservatism is ingrained in Russian life, from religion, politics, relationships, to clothing and presentation. This value is threaded throughout Russia's rich history of literature, ballet, painting, and classical music. To understand Russian people, one must appreciate that they have effectively survived two revolutions, two World Wars, and a Civil War in the 20th century. They have also experienced significant socioeconomic and political upheaval in recent decades. Post Soviet rule, a fundamental mistrust of anyone outside trusted circles developed.

MODESTY AND COMMUNICATION

Russians generally have a positive and curious listening pattern and they will value the same respect from you. Socializing is necessary to build relationships and trust within Russian society. Actively participating in discussions, rather than politely listening, is expected. People are also expected to understate personal achievements, contributions, and capacities and talk modestly (as most survive on a modest standard of living).



For centuries, Russian culture has centered around family and collectivism. Recent years have revealed a cultural shift towards individualism, resulting in more people choosing work and success over creating families.



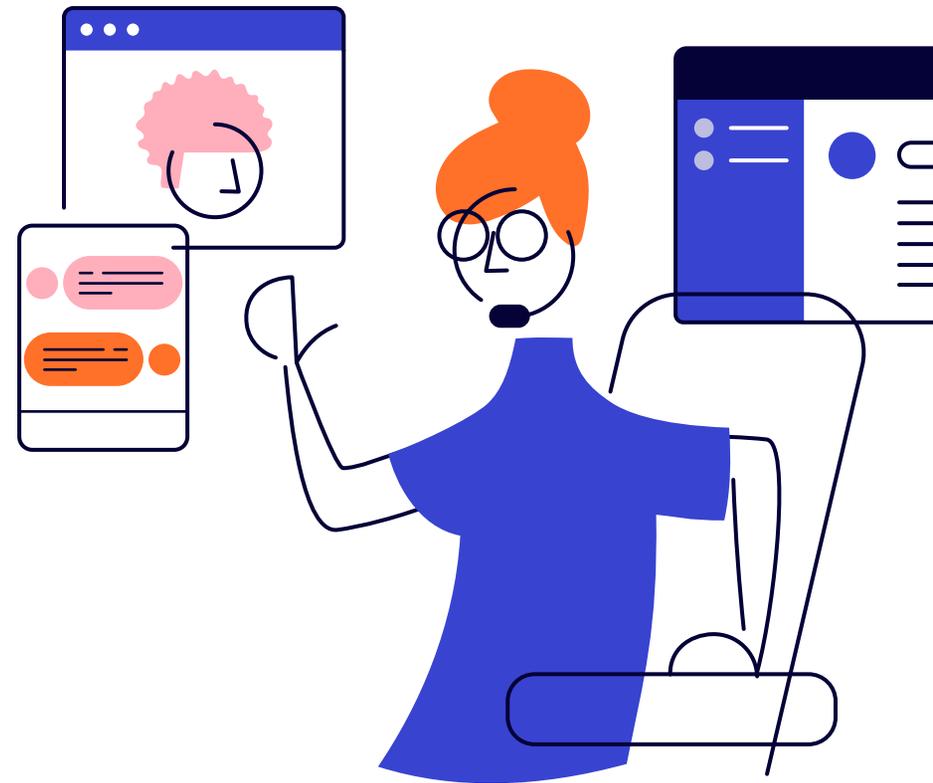
Best practices for communicating with Russian customers

BE POLITE

Traditional gender norms are still very much a part of Russian society, and there are gender-specific words that one should be mindful of when addressing a male or female. Russians also have a strong sense of hierarchy. Address strangers, older people, and those with higher social statuses formally. Avoid coming across as condescending no matter the age of the person with whom you're communicating. Treat each person with respect, and at the very least, as your equal.

BE DIRECT AND CONCISE

Russians have a direct manner of speaking. Refrain from giving unnecessary explanations and provide solutions for problems in real-time, not when it no longer serves them. From time to time, Russian people may feel the need to clear things up or sort out a situation. They may wish to share accumulated concerns, thoughts and questions that have not settled with them. Be mindful to present information respectfully, honestly and plainly. To Russians, it's a normal process of interaction. Whether both parties agree or disagree, the goal is to understand.



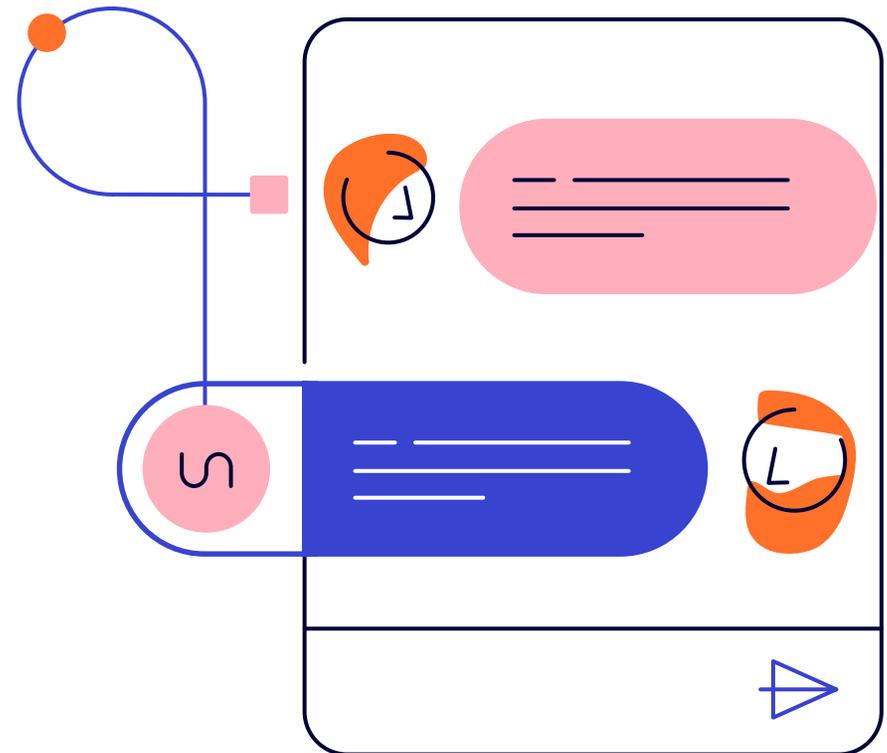
Best practices for communicating with Russian customers

BE KNOWLEDGEABLE

Demonstrating perseverance and flexibility while problem-solving will go a long way when interacting with Russians. Due to issues with logistics and increased interests in foreign products and services, Russians tend to do preliminary research to ask clarifying questions before making a decision. You can build trust with customers by listening, presenting clear solutions, and avoiding pushy sales tactics, which can be viewed as dishonest.



Knowledge of Russian culture and adapting sales and marketing strategies to Russia's business climate are key factors that will build trust and determine whether a product or service will be well-received.



Best practices for optimizing machine translation output

When writing in English with the knowledge that the content will be translated into Russian, there are several best practices to follow.



- 1 Avoid long sentences (over 30 words)

- 2 Avoid idioms or slang

- 3 Keep it simple and straightforward

- 4 Copyedit to avoid typos

- 5 Use active voice to reduce ambiguity

- 6 Avoid abbreviations, including contractions like "you're" and "we'd"

- 7 Be consistent, especially with terms like "email" that can be written multiple ways

- 8 Stick to English grammar rules
 - Ensure no spaces are missing
 - Use proper punctuation and capitalization
 - Finish all sentences (do not use fragments)
 - Avoid double subjects (e.g., the noun and a pronoun referencing it)
 - Ensure the word order is correct
 - Check for subject-verb agreement (person and number in singular/plural) and pronoun agreement (person, gender, and number)
 - Format messages correctly (e.g., with no extra line breaks, bullets or asterisks)



Best practices specific to English-Russian machine translation

1 USE FORMAL GREETING AND CLOSINGS

While both formal and informal tones can be used for customer service in Russian, the former is more widely used.

FORMAL GREETINGS

not advised

- Hi!
- Hey!

advised

- Hello,
- Good afternoon,
- Dear John,
- Dear Mr. Smith,

FORMAL CLOSINGS

not advised

- See you!
- Bye!

advised

- Best regards,
- Goodbye,
- Have a good day!

INFORMAL GREETINGS

not advised

- Hi!
- Hey!,

advised

- Hello!
- Hello, John

INFORMAL CLOSINGS

not advised

- See you!
- Bye!

advised

- Have a nice day!
- Goodbye!



Best practices specific to English-Russian machine translation

2 AVOID EMOJIS

not advised

- Good morning, Steffannie :)

advised

- Good morning, Steffannie.

3 AVOID INTERJECTIONS

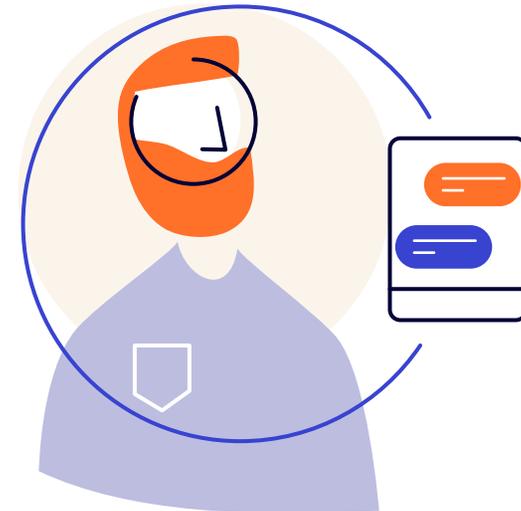
Interjections are another marker for the informal tone of voice and they should be avoided when writing to a French audience.

not advised

- Oh, I'm so sorry about that.
- Ah, that's alright.

advised

- I'm sorry about that.
- That's alright.



The Golden Rules of Customer Service



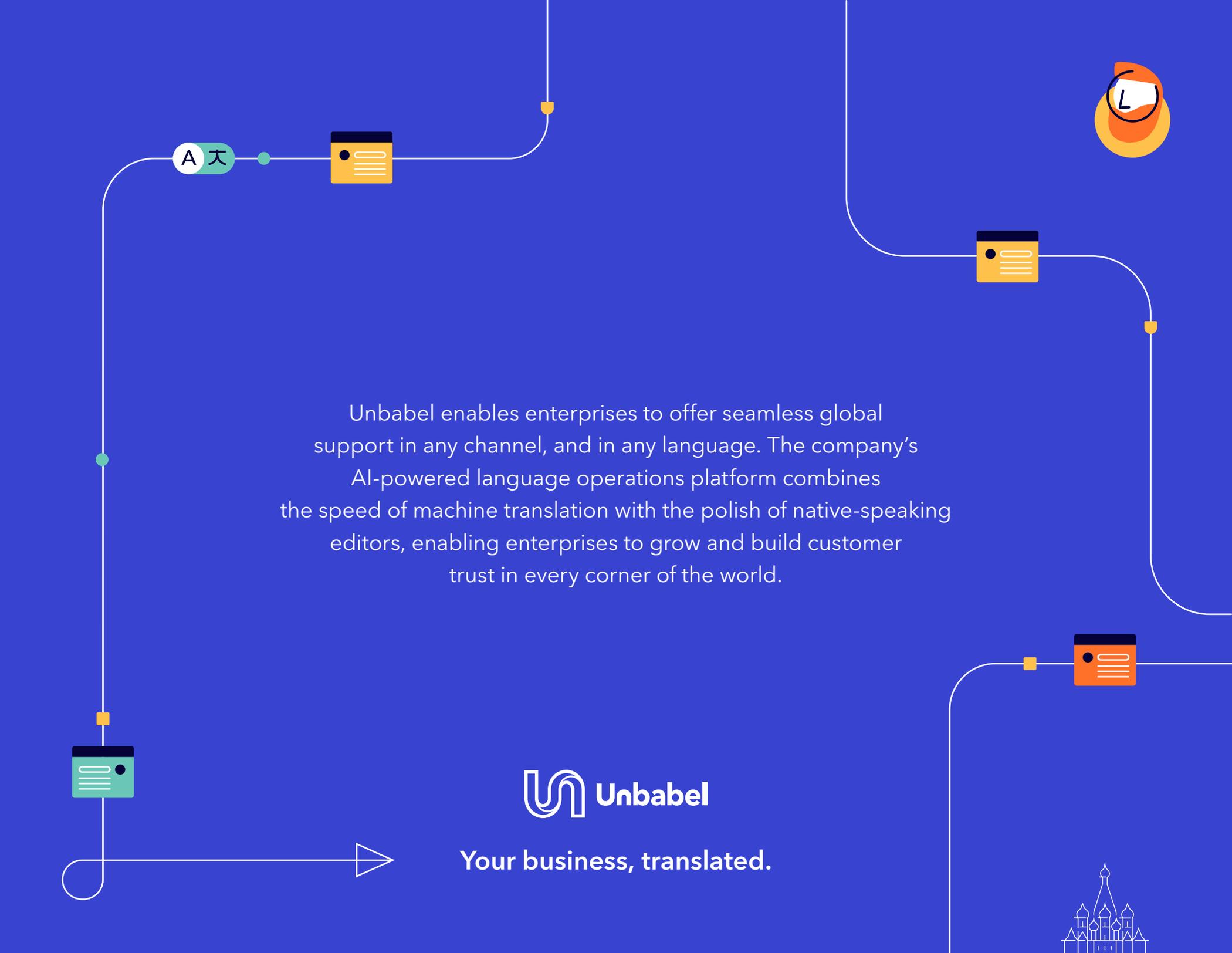
Of course, some best practices do not vary by language and should be applied to every customer service interaction. Here are the nine best practices we recommend.

- 1 EVERY INTERACTION MATTERS.** Always put in the best effort to make each interaction – every single one – a great one.
- 2 READ, DON'T SKIM.** Ensure you do not miss any valuable details or context in the message.
- 3 COMMUNICATE CONCISELY.** Only give the information you need to, helping your customer to find the answers to their questions or queries as fast and as efficiently as possible.
- 4 FOCUS ON GREAT SUPPORT BEFORE FAST SUPPORT.** Speed is important, of course, but it should not take precedence over quality.
- 5 MAKE THINGS EASY.** Always aim to reduce customer effort and take the burden off them when it comes to getting answers or help for their concern.

- 6 BE RESPECTFUL.** Always say “please” and “thank you.” This applies across cultural contexts and demographics. Politeness never goes out of style.
- 7 TAKE A NEUTRAL STANCE ON ISSUES.** There’s no reason to cause friction in a customer service interaction. Don’t take a stance on issues – even ones that seem harmless.
- 8 REMAIN POSITIVE.** This helps customers gain confidence in your ability to help them.
- 9 USE SIMPLE TERMS.** Keep it simple to avoid confusion and mistranslation when working across languages and cultural context, but don’t patronize customers.

In today’s competitive and globalized business climate, businesses who treat their customers with care and respect – including by speaking their language and respecting their cultural norms – will have the most success.





Unbabel enables enterprises to offer seamless global support in any channel, and in any language. The company's AI-powered language operations platform combines the speed of machine translation with the polish of native-speaking editors, enabling enterprises to grow and build customer trust in every corner of the world.



Your business, translated.

