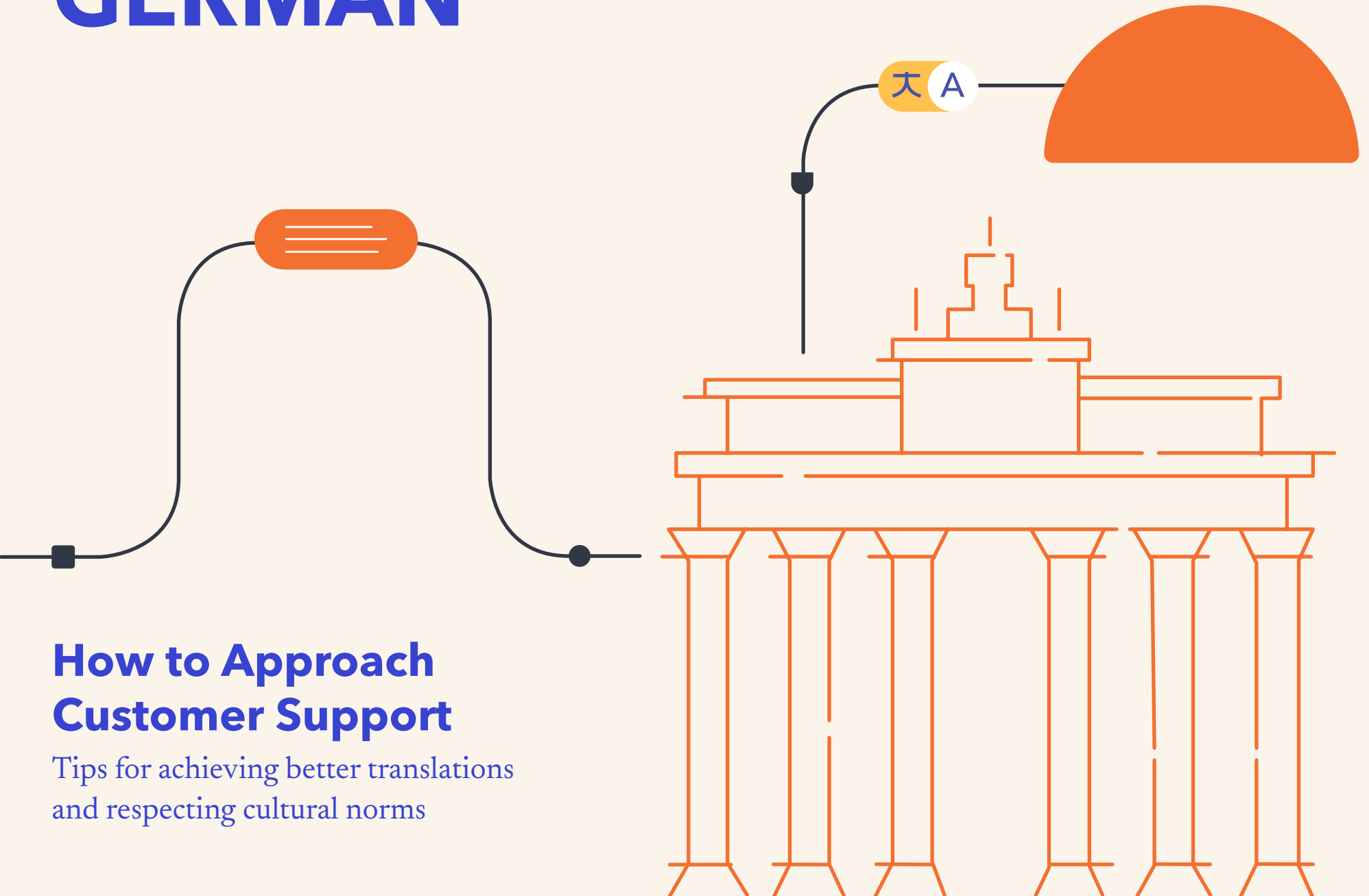


GERMAN



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 helpful and illuminating context in an easy-to-digest format. In this guide, we'll cover the German language.



About the German language

Around the world, about 130 million people speak German as their native language. In fact, German is the most widely spoken mother language in the world. (A mother language is one from which many others are descended.) German is also one of the official languages in six European countries: Germany, Austria, Belgium, Switzerland, Liechtenstein, and Luxembourg. In total, about 7.5 million people worldwide belong to a German-speaking

minority. In this guide, we will focus specifically on German speakers from the country of Germany, but many of the nuances apply to German speakers who reside in other countries as well.

BITTE

HERRLICH

VIELEN DANK



Core concepts in German culture relevant to customer service

LOW CONTEXT

German culture is considered "low context," in the sense that little attention is given to non-verbal cues and body languages. Germans may have difficulty interpreting other people's intentions, or reading between the lines. Therefore, remain patient and do not assume anything based on their response – or lack thereof – to more subtle forms of communication.

RESTRAINT

Additionally, German speakers, particularly those from Germany, tend to be restrained. Emotions are not usually displayed openly, and doing so may be discredited as unprofessional. In fact, in a business context, trust and credibility are developed through the suppression of emotions. Avoid overly emotive or expressive language and "stick to the facts" when communicating in German.

FORMALITY

Finally, German speakers are often formal and reserved. They take comfort in following a shared set of rules and place heavy emphasis on protocols. They are sensitive to position and age and may demonstrate deference based on these characteristics.



Best practices for communicating with German customers

BE DIRECT

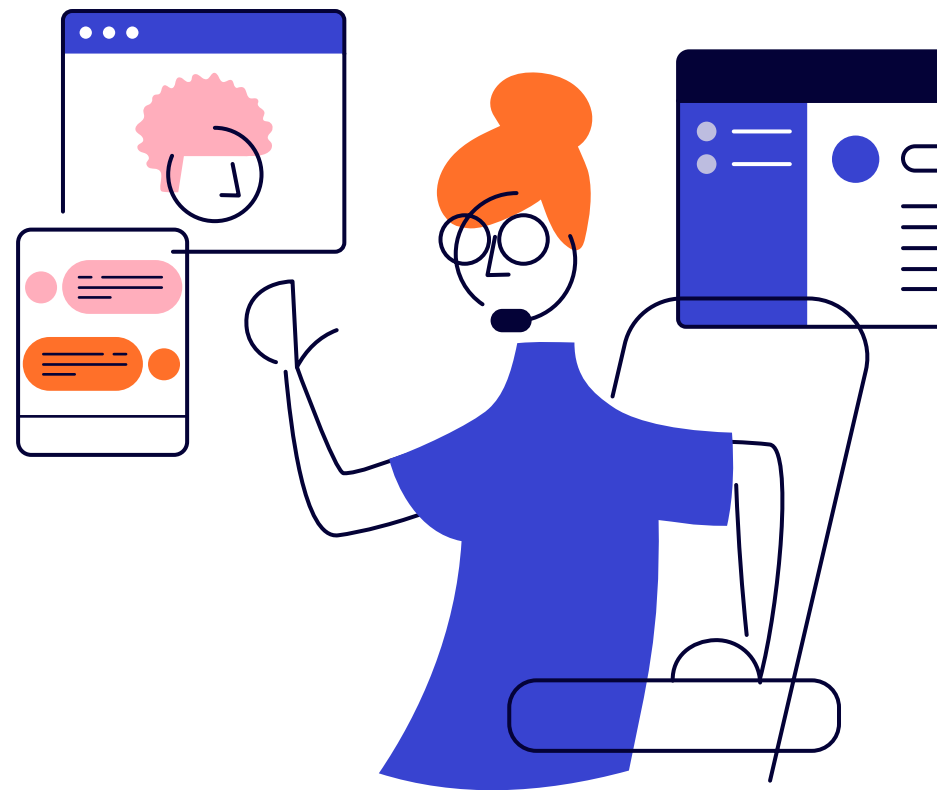
Germans usually appreciate straightforward and direct speech. They are polite and have a formal way of communicating; they tend to think before speaking and do not like to beat around the bush.

STAY FORMAL

Greetings should be formal. If they have an academic title that is appropriate to use in the context, do so. Always use their last name as well. For example, it is better to address someone as Herr or Frau [Last Name] rather than using their first name in a customer service context.

STICK TO FACTS

Germans are generally pragmatic, analytical, and logical. As a result, they appreciate responses that are factual, precise, and truthful. They value efficiency and do not appreciate improvisation.

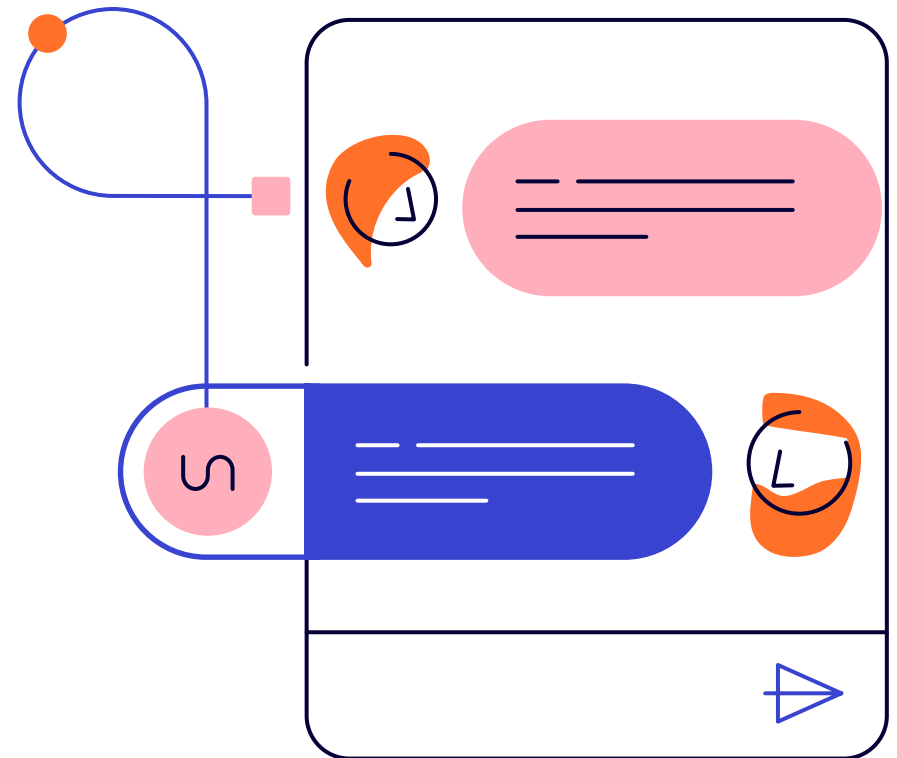


Best practices for communicating with German customers

ACCEPT CRITICISM

When it comes to reasoning, Germans tend to think and argue deductively, using theoretical knowledge to build an argument. Because of this fact-orientation, they may at times appear confrontational and overly critical. However, criticism is viewed as a sign of forthrightness and honesty within the German culture. So do not assume that directness equals rudeness.

In summary, to best communicate with Germans, aim to transmit information directly and efficiently, through the use of objective logic and expertise, rather than emotional appeals.



Best practices for optimizing machine translation output

When writing in English with the knowledge that the content will be translated into German, 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-German machine translation

1 USE FORMAL GREETINGS AND CLOSINGS

In German, the formal tone is widely used in customer support. Please stick to a more formal English by following the examples below:

GREETINGS

not advised

- Hi/Hey!
- How are you?
- How was your day today?

advised

- Dear Mr. Smith
(when you know the person's surname)
- Good morning, Peter
(when you don't know the person's surname)

CLOSINGS

not advised

- Goodbye!
- See you!
- Have a great day!

advised

- With kind regards,
- Yours sincerely,,

2 AVOID EMOJIS

not advised

- Good morning, Stefannie :)

advised

- Good morning, Stefannie.

3 AVOID INTERJECTIONS

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



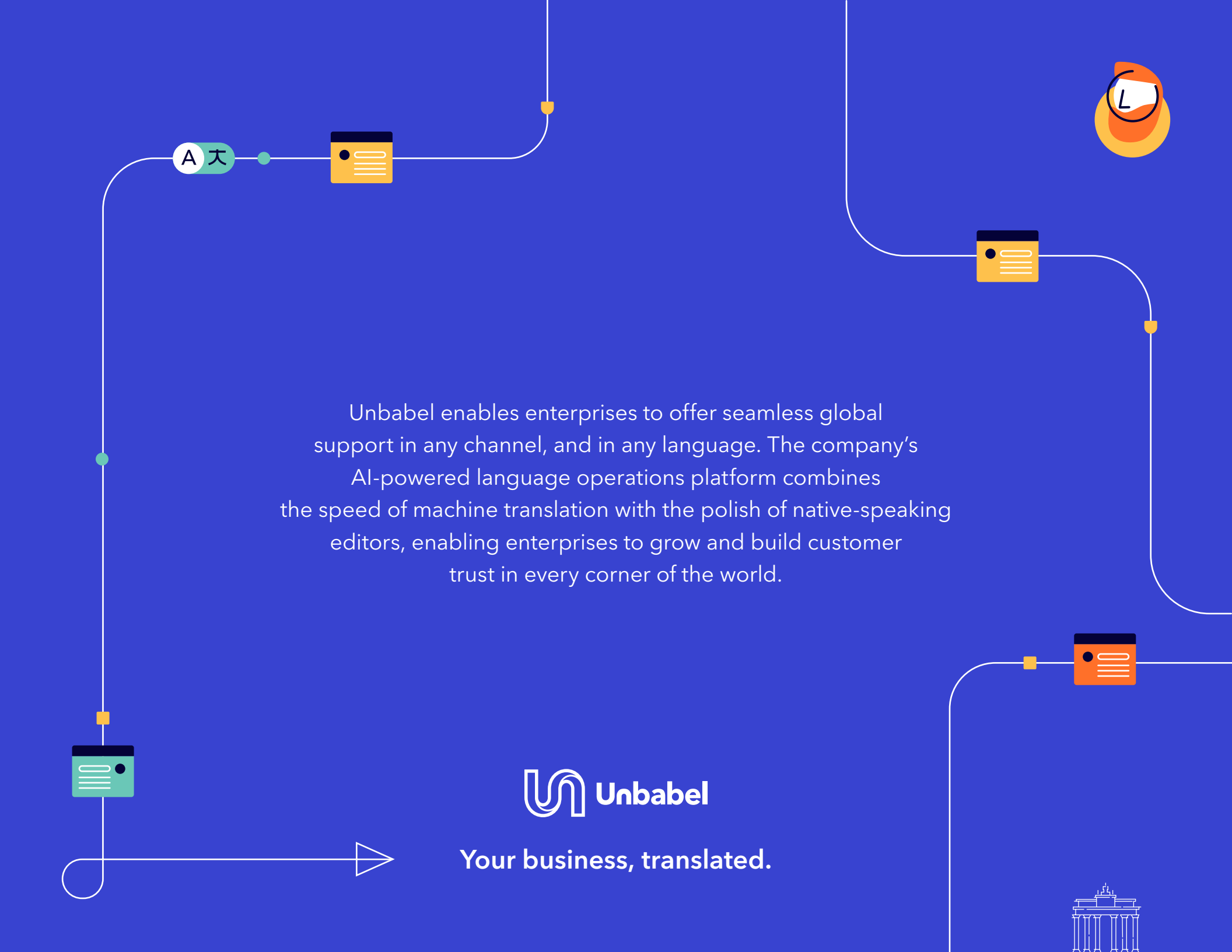
Of course, some best practices do not vary by language and should be applied to every customer service interaction. Here are the nine best practices we recommend.

- 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.