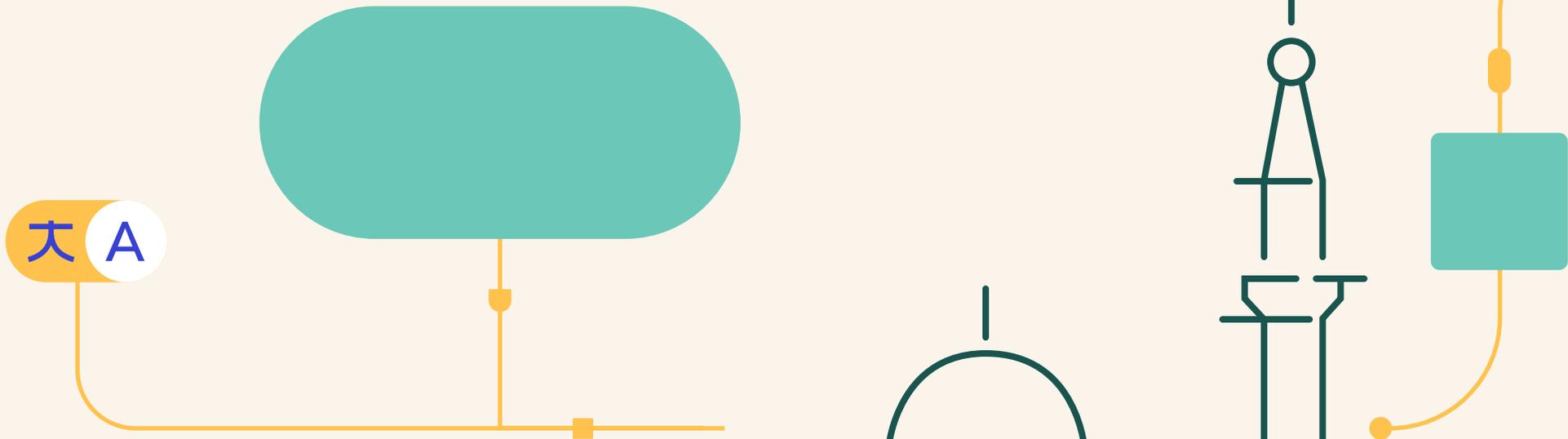


ARABIC



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 Arabic language.



About the Arabic language

With over 315 million speakers, Arabic is the fifth most spoken language in the world. It's also one of the six official languages of the United Nations. It's the official language or working language of Algeria, Bahrain, Chad, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tanzania, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen.

This Semitic language is derived from Aramaic, uses diacritical marks, and consists of eighteen shapes representing twenty-eight phonetic sounds. It's also written and read from right to left. Classified as either Classical (reserved for the Qur'an) or Modern Standard (widely used today), there are many dialects of Arabic spread throughout the world.



The Arabic language doesn't distinguish between upper and lower case letters. Instead quotation marks are used to mark the distinction. Arabic is also relatively easy for Hebrew speakers to learn (and vice versa) due to the similarities of both the Semitic languages.

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Core concepts in Arab culture relevant to customer service

FAMILY

Devotion, honor, loyalty, and reputation are central to the family unit. Parents often take care of their children well into adulthood, and children provide for their parents as they age or become ill. The family is how a person inherits their identity, religion, and place in society. Gender roles are strongly defined, with women traditionally being responsible for maintaining the home and men being the earners and in power. However, there is an increasing number of women receiving advanced education and joining the workforce as well.

HOSPITALITY

In a post-9/11 world, overwhelming stereotypes and misconceptions surround Arab culture, like fundamentalism, patriarchy, and poverty. In spite of these perceptions, hospitality is a notable trait in the Arab world. The absence of a helpful nature could negatively impact the reputation of a person or business. In turn, Arabs expect those they interact with to reciprocate that value. Go the extra mile for your customer whenever possible to create a lasting impression.

COLLECTIVISM

With an emphasis on honor and having a strong sense of duty, each person needs to strive to be an exemplary member of society. Strict adherence to patriarchal and hierarchical structures is of the utmost importance. Loyalty and dedication to family, social groups, political institutions, and religious authorities also hold value in society.



Since the Holy Qur'an is written in Arabic, Arabs believe that words have power. They shun speaking or writing about unpleasant circumstances by using euphemisms instead. It's also important not to mention or depict Allah or the Prophet Mohammed in a bad light or jokingly to prevent offending.



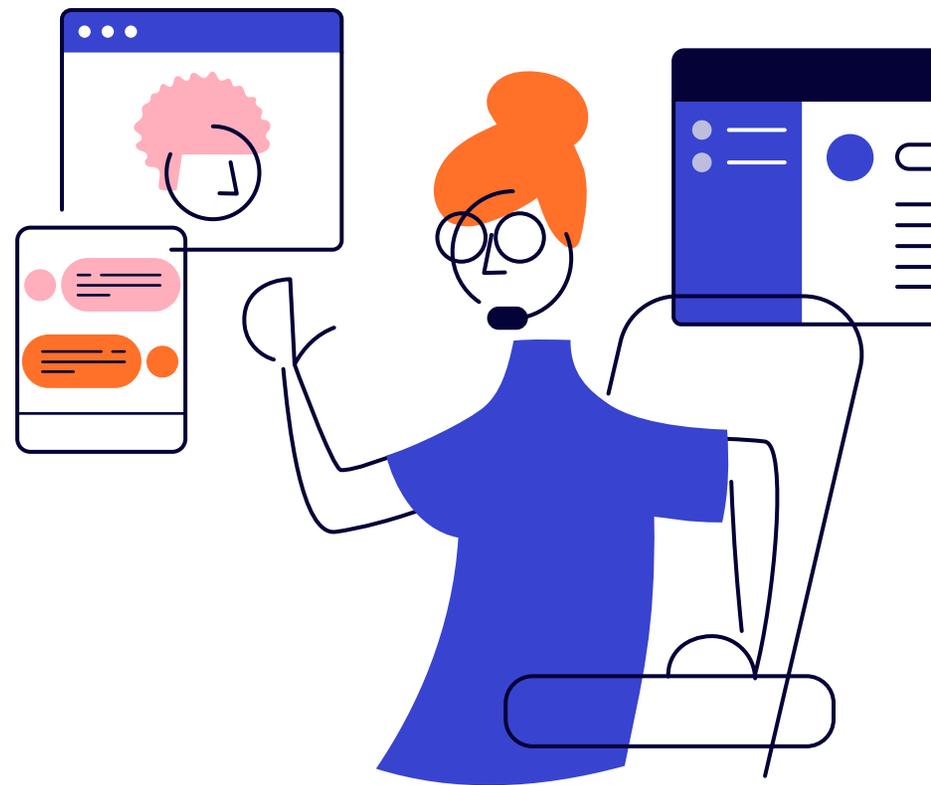
Best practices for communicating with Arabic-speaking customers

CULTIVATE PATIENCE

Keep in mind that the Arab community does not subscribe to the "time is money" mantra that many Westerners do. Being impatient or showing too much urgency can result in a loss of trust or respect. Finding creative solutions for problems your customers are facing will help you build trust and inspire loyalty. Choose your words with care and eloquence, as Arab speakers tend to be expressive and poetic in speech – colorful language and proverbs are common in everyday conversations. It's also important to recognize that there is no strict use of the future tense in Arabic. Avoid referring to complicated ideas with words like would, could, should, and might, and speak with clarity and certainty.

DEMONSTRATE VALUES

Many, but not all, Arabs practice Islam, but showing respect for the religion, such as using greetings and salutations that sincerely evoke peace or well wishes, is a way to build trust and demonstrate your understanding of Arab values. Be mindful of products to avoid and cultural restrictions that typically govern daily activities. Be sure to focus on products and services that provide value within those boundaries.



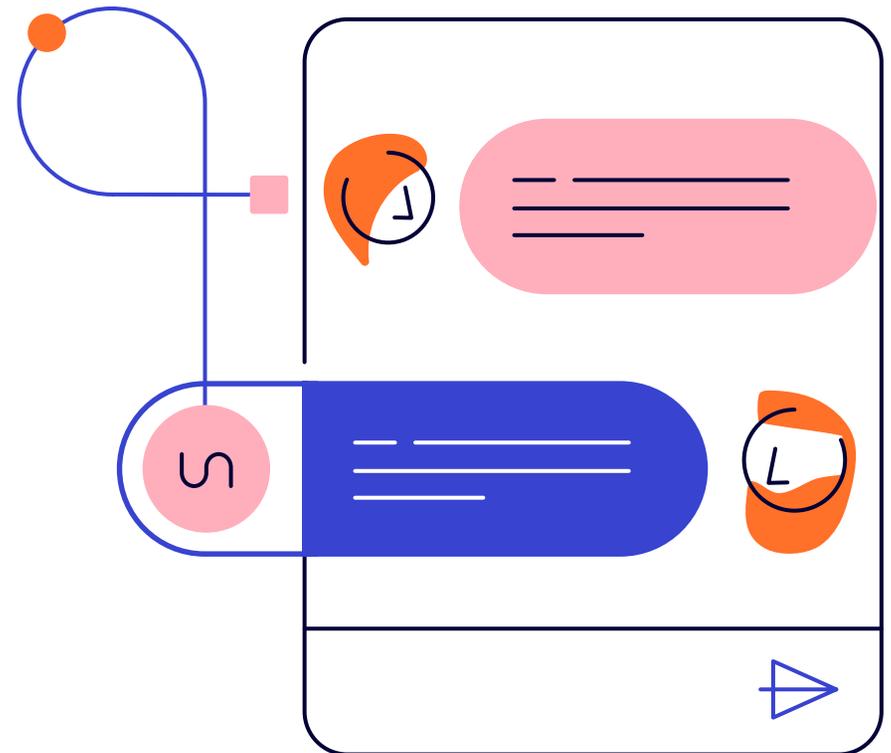
Best practices for communicating with Arabic-speaking customers

BE OBSERVANT

Understanding different cultural interests within the Arab speaking world is essential. For example, Saudis are known to rank high in the indulgence category while Egyptians typically rate low in that aspect. Making purchases online is new for many Arabs due to the ease of shopping for services and products at malls and souks where they can get immediate answers to their questions. If you're able, try to cultivate relationships with your customers using live chat and email. They want to know they're communicating with a real person and clear up any uncertainty. Make shipping information, policies, pricing easy to find and the check-out process easy to follow.

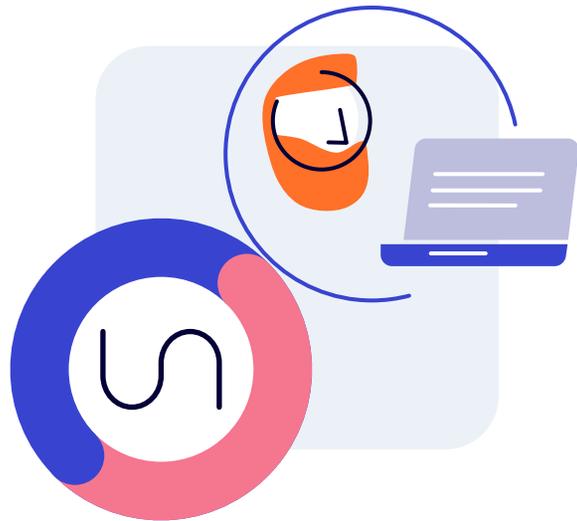


Roughly 30% of the Middle East's population (108 million people) is between 15 and 29 years old, making it one of the world's most youthful markets! Despite having greater access to technology and translation services than previous generations, they would still prefer to buy products or services in their native language.



Best practices for optimizing machine translation output

When writing in English with the knowledge that the content will be translated into Arabic, 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)



How to write in English for Arabic machine translation

1 USE THE FORMAL AND INFORMAL TONES CORRECTLY

In Arabic, both formal and informal tones can be used in customer support. Please stick to these rules when writing English by following the examples below.

FORMAL REGISTER GREETINGS

not advised

- Hi!
- Hey!

advised

- Hello Mr. Smith,

INFORMAL REGISTER GREETINGS

not advised

- Hi!
- Hey!

advised

- Hello, John

FORMAL REGISTER CLOSINGS

not advised

- See you!
- Bye!

advised

- Best regards,

FORMAL REGISTER CLOSINGS

not advised

- See you!
- Bye!

advised

- Best regards,



How to write in English for Arabic machine translation

2 AVOID EMOJIS

not advised

- Good morning, Stefannie :)

advised

- Good morning, Stefannie.

3 AVOID INTERJECTIONS

Interjections are more suited to the spoken language than to the written language and they should be avoided when writing to a Arabic 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.



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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.

