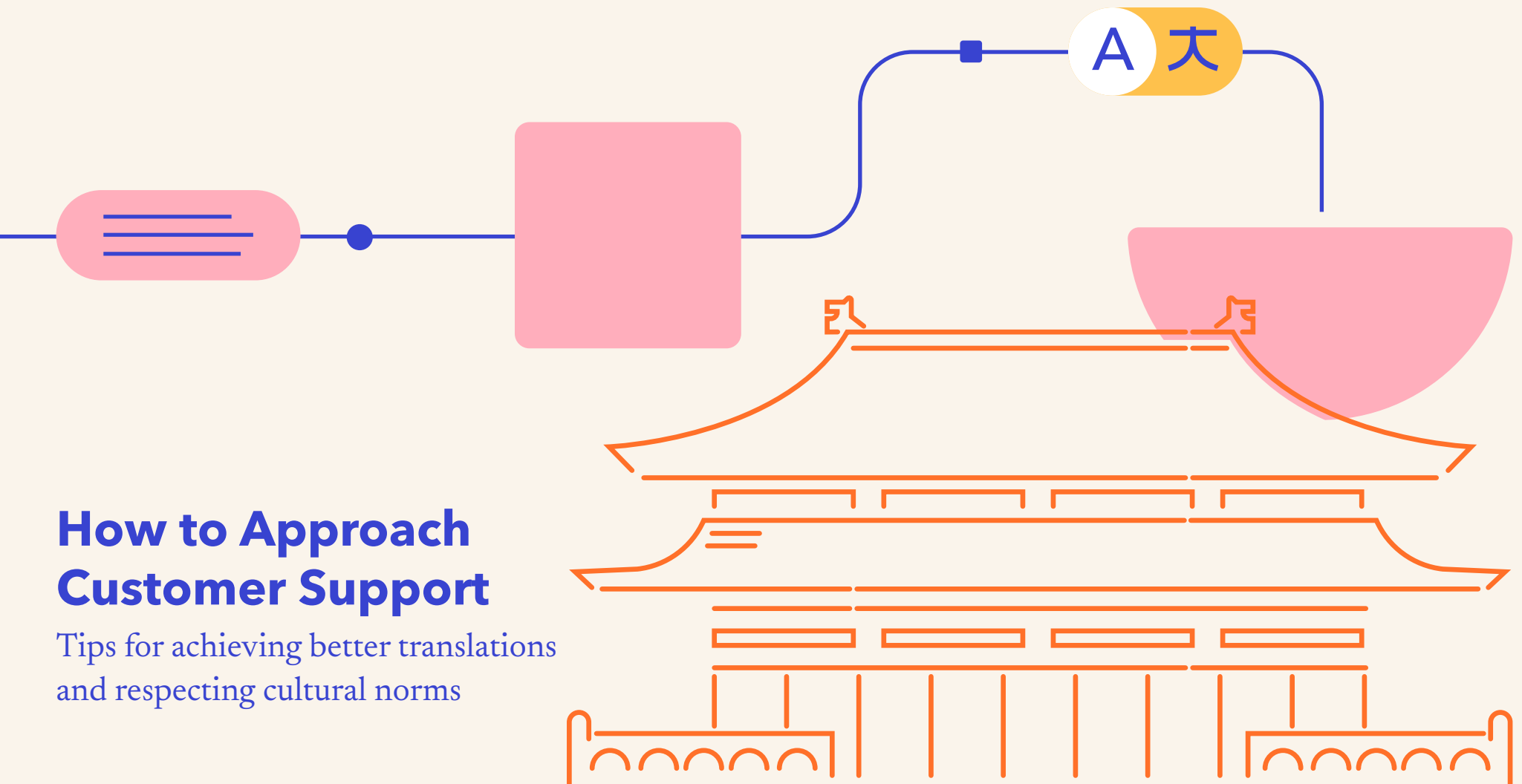


CHINESE (SIMPLIFIED AND TRADITIONAL)



How to Approach Customer Support

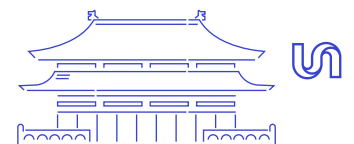
Tips for achieving better translations and respecting cultural norms

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 lay out the best practices for communicating with Chinese customers using both the Traditional and Simplified varieties, and the basic nuances that would work for Chinese speakers from all over the world.



About the Chinese language

The Chinese language is the oldest written language in the world – it has at least 6000 years of history. With roughly 1.3 billion speakers (or 16% of the world's population), it's the most widely spoken language in the world (more than English!). It's an official language in several countries including China, Taiwan, Singapore, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Tibet, and Malaysia.

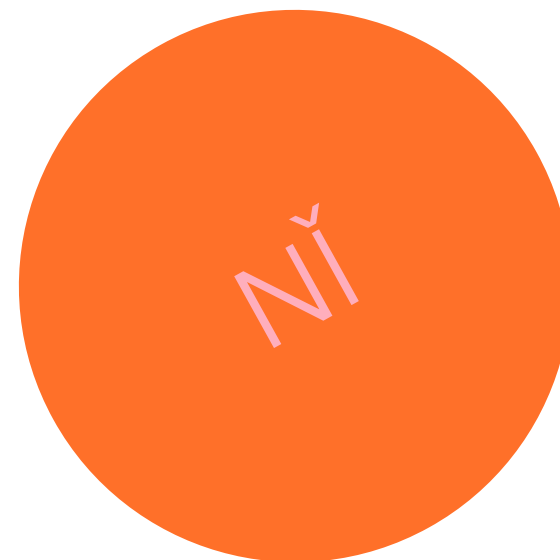
Written Chinese comes in two varieties:

SIMPLIFIED: Simpler characters, fewer strokes. Mainly used in mainland China, Singapore, and Malaysia, along with international organizations such as the United Nations and World Bank.

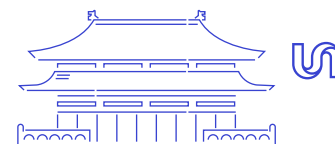
TRADITIONAL: Preserves older characters. Mainly used in Hong Kong and Taiwan.



There are hundreds of varieties of Chinese, but these are not just different variants of the same language – there are several that are mutually unintelligible. Some of them are even considered separate languages.



Hǎo



Core concepts in Chinese culture relevant to customer service

CONFUCIANISM

Confucianism, more a philosophy than a religion, is a pillar of the Chinese society. It's an all-encompassing concept that proposes revering ancestors and human-centered religiousness as a way of life and thinking. In Confucianism, everyday life is where religion lives. While Confucianism has evolved over the years, it still acts as a source of values and shapes the modern Chinese society.

FACE

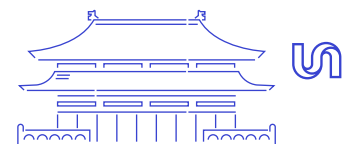
The concept of “face” is a priority to the Chinese, and it refers to a person's integrity, prestige, and dignity. Positive interactions, like praise, help a person save face, while anger or accusations will cause them to lose face and diminish them in public. They prize their reputation and how they're perceived by those around them.

GUANXI

Guanxi plays a crucial role in Chinese culture. Guanxi refers to strong trust and a sustainable relationship that involves moral obligations and exchanging favors. Building guanxi is a key part of maintaining long-term relationships with your customers – and customer retention. This involves little steps like showing a clear understanding of the Chinese culture and making a conscious effort to establish trustworthy connections.



“Have you eaten?” and “Where have you been?” are pleasantries similar to “How are you doing?” in English. No need to go into details in your response! A simple “yes” or a “thank you” would suffice.



Best practices for communicating with Chinese customers

NEGATIVITY IS A NO-NO

“Telling it like it is” might be viewed as an admirable trait in several other countries; but in China, openly negative and blunt statements are viewed as inconsiderate. Indirect communication is the best way to establish trust with your Chinese customer. If you get a statement like “not a big issue” or “the problem is not serious” from your customer, watch out: This usually means that there are still issues or that the problem is actually serious.

EXPECT DISTRUST AND SUSPICION

At first contact with your Chinese customer, you might feel that they don't trust you to solve their problem. Don't take this personally; this is simply because the Chinese don't want to lose face and are risk-averse. However, following all the right formalities in greeting and addressing them and putting in the effort to build trust will quickly get your conversation on the right track.



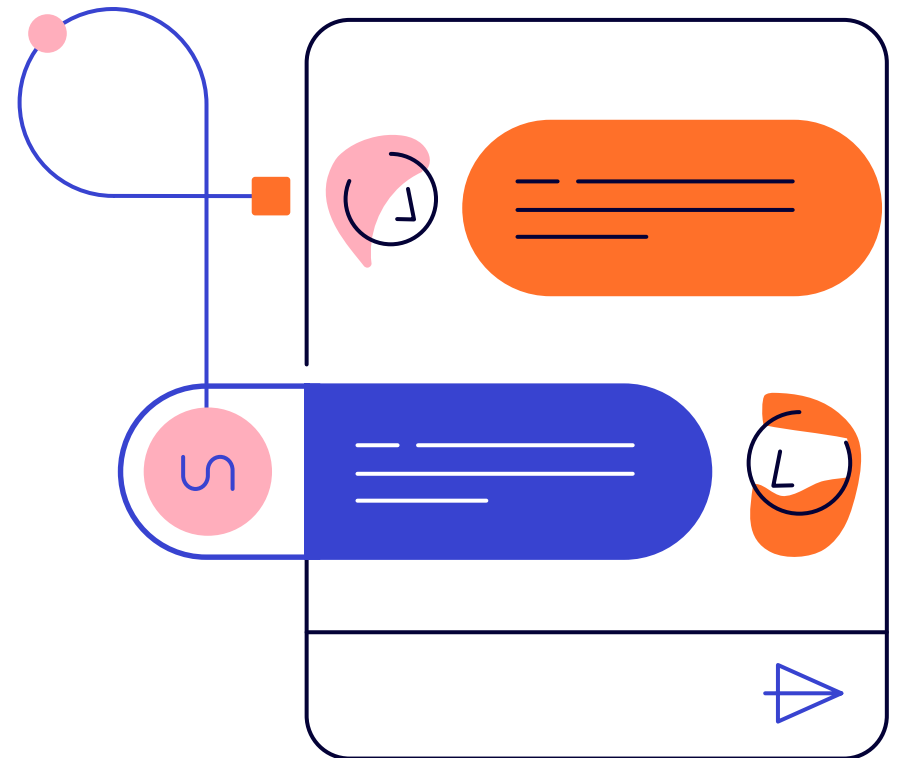
Best practices for communicating with Chinese customers

GET READY FOR SMALL TALK

It's good to respect your customer's time and get straight to solving their issues, but if your customer starts the conversation with some small talk, make sure to indulge them and break the ice. Acceptable conversation topics include climate, travel, scenery, Chinese culture (art, history, etc.), weather, food and personal or family topics. On the other hand, steer clear of taboo topics like animal treatment (and COVID-19), human rights, Taiwan, Tibet, and politics.



Respect your Chinese customer's silence. Don't pressure them with hard-selling tactics. Wait until they're finished before you start addressing their concerns.

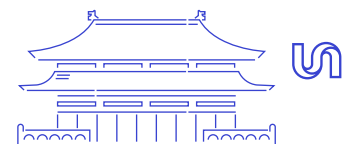


Best practices for optimizing machine translation output

When writing in English with the knowledge that the content will be translated into Chinese, 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
- 9 Ensure no spaces are missing
- 10 Use proper punctuation and capitalization
- 11 Finish all sentences (do not use fragments)
- 12 Avoid double subjects (e.g., the noun and a pronoun referencing it)
- 13 Ensure the word order is correct
- 14 Check for subject-verb agreement (person and number in singular/plural) and pronoun agreement (person, gender, and number)
- 15 Format messages correctly (e.g., with no extra line breaks, bullets or asterisks)



How to write in English for Simplified and Traditional Chinese machine translation

1 USE FORMAL GREETINGS AND CLOSINGS

In Simplified and Traditional Chinese, an informal register is never used in customer support. Instead, use a formal tone.

GREETINGS

not advised

- Hi there!
- Good day, mate
- Dear Peter,
- How was your day today?
- I hope this email finds you well.
- Hi,

advised

- Dear customer,
- Dear Mr. Zhang,
- Dear Ms. Chen,
- Respected customer,
- Thank you for contacting us.
- This is [your company's name] support.
- Thanks for waiting, dear customer.
- What can I do for you?

Introduce yourself properly using these examples

not advised

- John here, about your email yesterday.
- Jane from [your company's name] support is here.

advised

- Thank you for contacting us.
- I am John, and I will assist you.
- Thank you for contacting us.
- This is Jane from [your company's name] support.
- Thank you for contacting us. This is [your company's name] support.

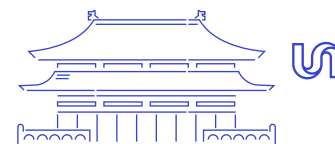
CLOSINGS

not advised

- Bye for now!
- Goodbye!
- See you!
- It was nice working with you.

advised

- With kind regards,
- With regards,
- Yours sincerely,



How to write in English for Simplified and Traditional Chinese machine translation

2 AVOID EMOJIS

not advised

- Good morning, Stefannie :)

advised

- Good morning, Stefannie.

3 AVOID INTERJECTIONS

Interjections should be avoided when writing to a Chinese audience, because it can be perceived as rude.

not advised

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

advised

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

4 AVOID THESE EXPRESSIONS

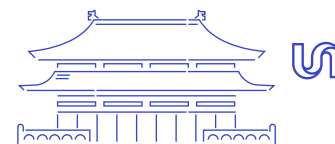
While some expressions might be perfectly acceptable in English, they don't translate well in Simplified and Traditional Chinese. These expressions might come off as rude or inappropriate in this specific culture. Avoid being overly friendly with a customer. There should always be a formal distance between you and the customer, even if the customer is friendly with you.

not advised

- How are you?
- How was your day today?
- Great working with you.
- Hope we sorted your problem.
- Have a good time!
- Don't worry!
- It was nice working with you.
- I am happy that [...]
- By the way, I hope that [...]
- Thank you for sharing your concern.
- I hope this email finds/ /meets you well.

advised

- Hello, John here.
- I hope you're doing fine while reading this email.
- It was an honor to assist/ serve you.
- Thank you for contacting us.
- Thank you for using our products.
- It was a pleasure to help you.
- I hope you are happy with my service today.
- Thank you for your patronage.



The Golden Rules of Customer Service

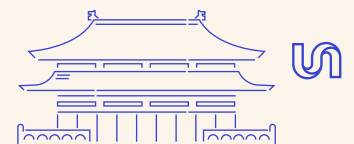


Of course, some best practices do not vary by language and should be applied to every customer service interaction. Here are the nine best practices we recommend.

- 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.



A 天



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.

