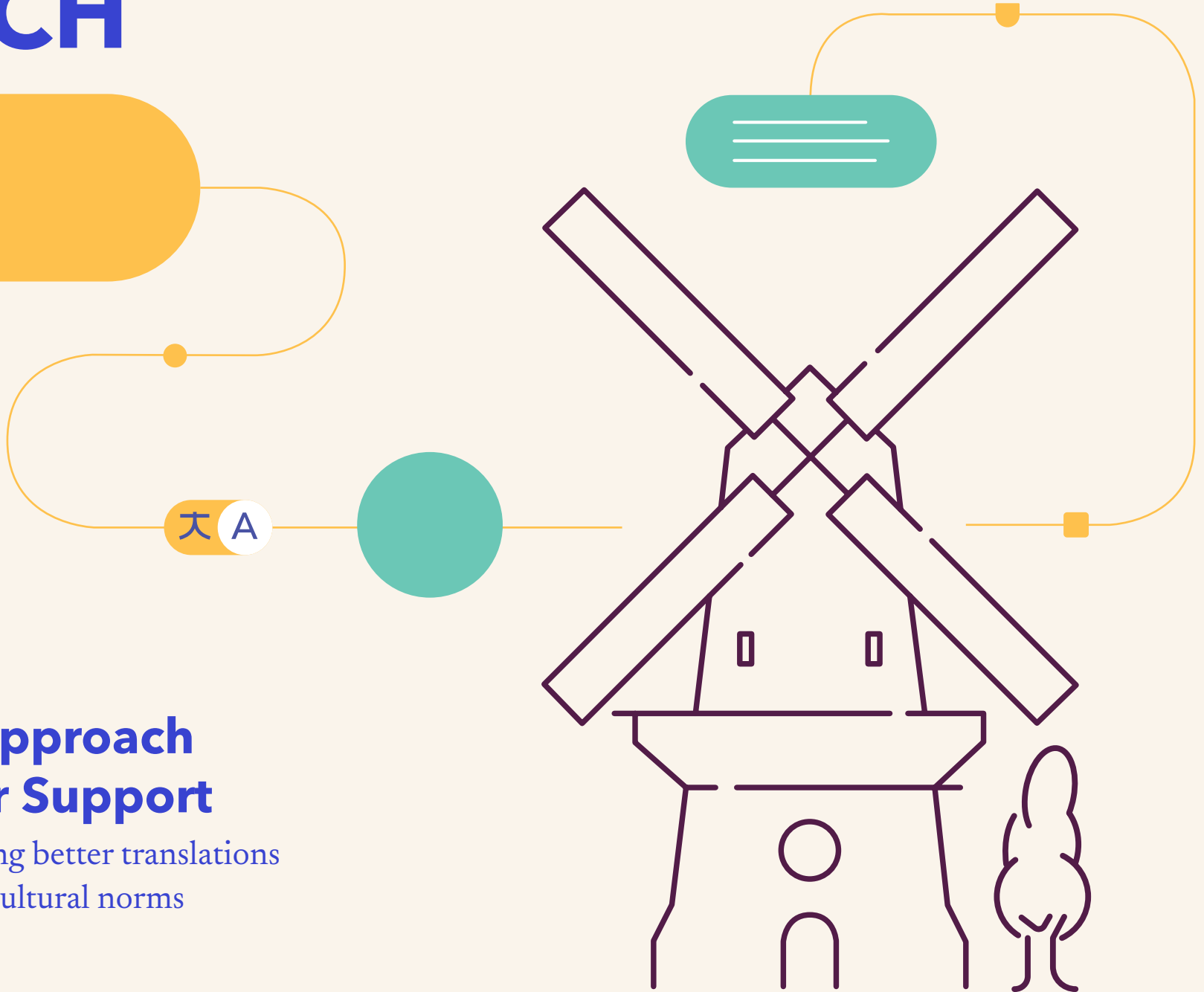


DUTCH



How to Approach Customer Support

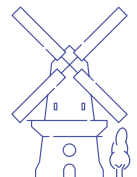
Tips for achieving better translations and respecting cultural norms

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 Dutch language.



About the Dutch Language

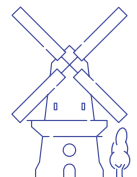
Around the world, over 22 million people speak Dutch as their native language. Most Dutch speakers are concentrated in the Netherlands, where it is the official language, and Belgium, where Dutch is one of three official languages. It is also spoken in Suriname in South America and the Dutch Antilles. Older native speakers of Dutch can also be found in Australia, the U.S., New Zealand, and Canada due to immigration patterns in the

1950s. (Source.) In this guide, we will focus specifically on Dutch speakers from the country of the Netherlands, but many of the nuances apply to Dutch speakers who reside in other countries as well.

GEWELDIG

DANK JE

ALSTUBLIEFT



Core concepts in Dutch culture relevant to customer service

LOW CONTEXT

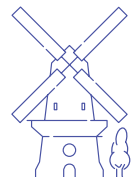
Dutch culture is considered "low context," in the sense that the Dutch typically pay little attention to non-verbal cues and body language. They are straightforward communicators. As a result, the Dutch may have difficulty interpreting other people's intentions, or reading between the lines. Therefore, remain patient and do not assume anything based on their response – or lack thereof – to more subtle forms of communication.

PRAGMATISM

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

RISK-AVERSE

Finally, Dutch speakers tend to be frugal, risk-averse, and tough negotiators. They are willing to experiment, but they also want minimal risk. The Dutch require convincing to make big investments and require evidence when appealing to their sense of reason.



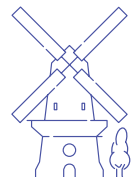
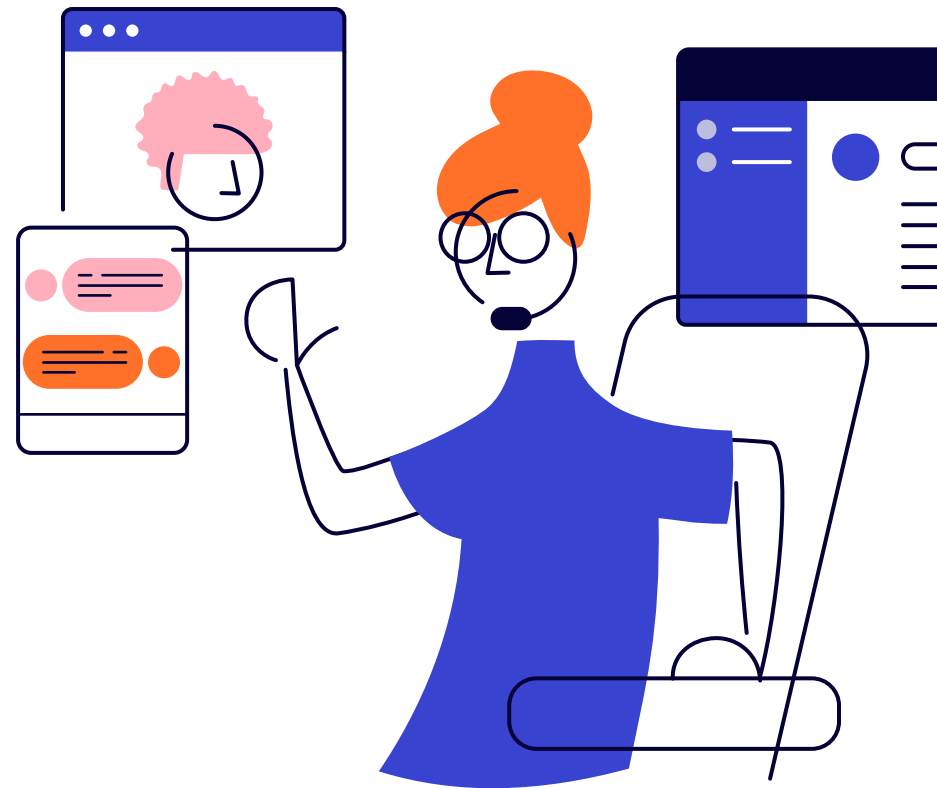
Best practices for communicating with Dutch customers

BE DIRECT

The Dutch usually appreciate straightforward and direct speech. They tend to speak in a friendly tone of voice and use short sentences. Being too polite is viewed as distrustful, as the Dutch communicate frankly. They also view excessive politeness as a waste of time.

AVOID RHETORICAL QUESTIONS AND FAUX FORMALITY

In the Netherlands, the standard in-person greeting is a handshake and a phrase such as "good day." The Dutch rarely, if ever, use rhetorical questions like "How are you?" Academic titles and qualifications are used sparingly, typically only in formal documents. Generally, you can use someone's first name during your first encounter with them.



Best practices for communicating with Dutch customers

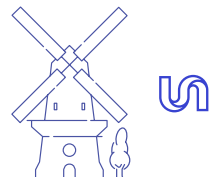
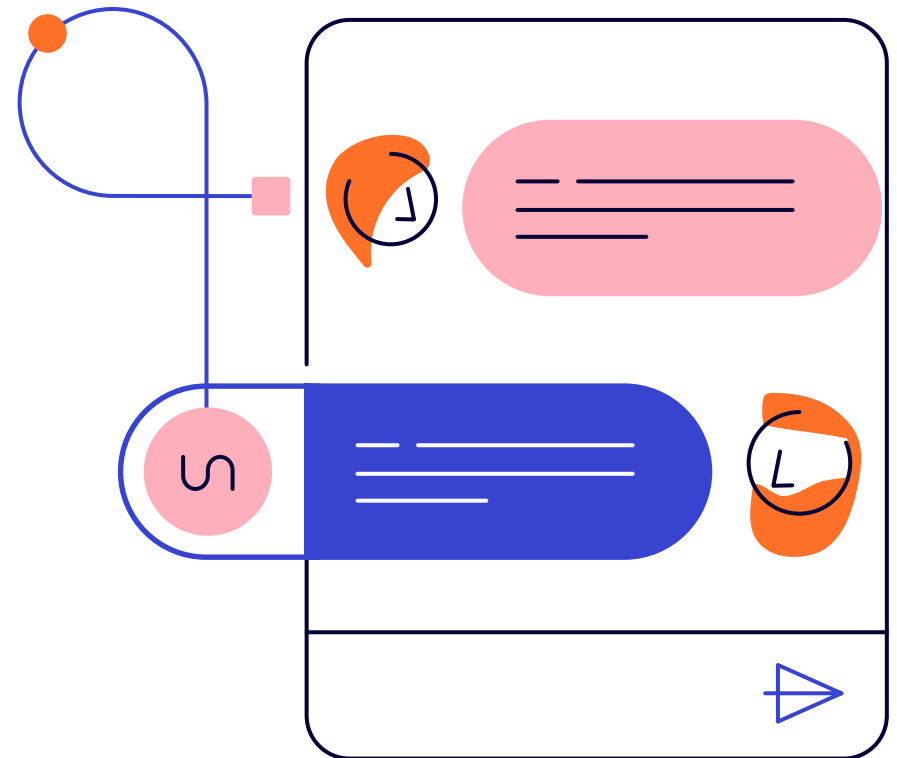
ACCEPT CRITICISM

The Dutch expect others to be open and direct with them. While criticism is leveled regardless of status or rank, it is expected that the criticism will be returned. Salespeople often disagree openly with their customers, as the Dutch view criticism as an opportunity to learn from mistakes.

BE FORTHRIGHT

As part of their pragmatic mindset, the Dutch will test the honesty of their business partners. They do not like to be viewed as gullible. Appeal to their sense of reason using concrete facts to prove that you are reliable and honest with them.

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

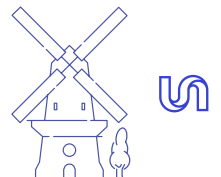


Best practices for optimizing machine translation output

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

1 USE FORMAL GREETINGS AND CLOSINGS

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

GREETINGS

not advised

- Hey/Hi!
- 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

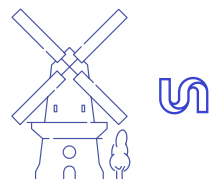
Interjections are another marker for the informal tone of voice and they should be avoided when writing to a Dutch audience:

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

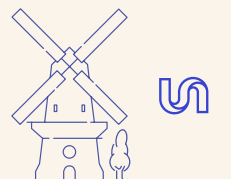


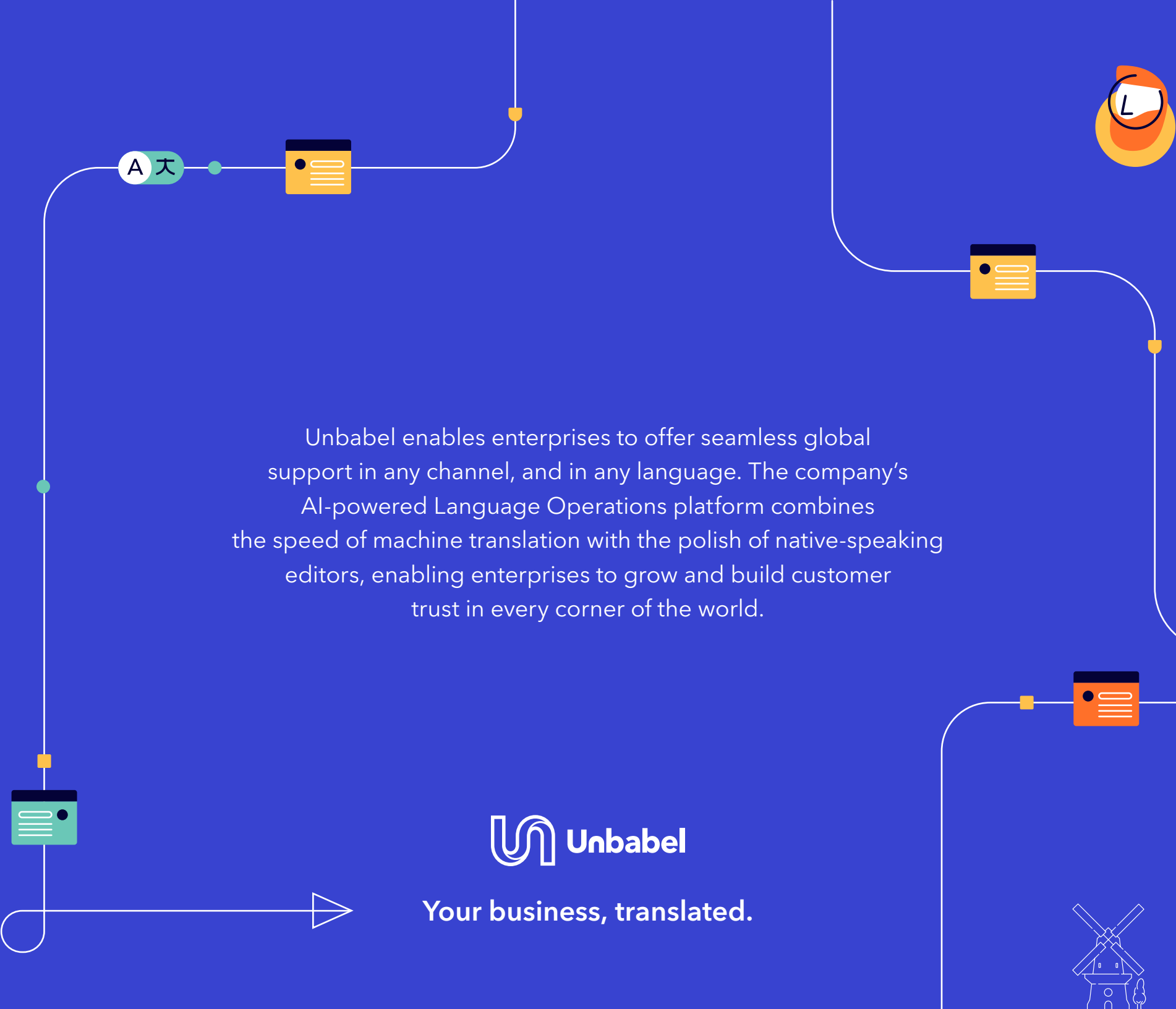
Of course, some best practices do not vary by language and should be applied to every customer service interaction. Here are the nine best practices we recommend.

- 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.

