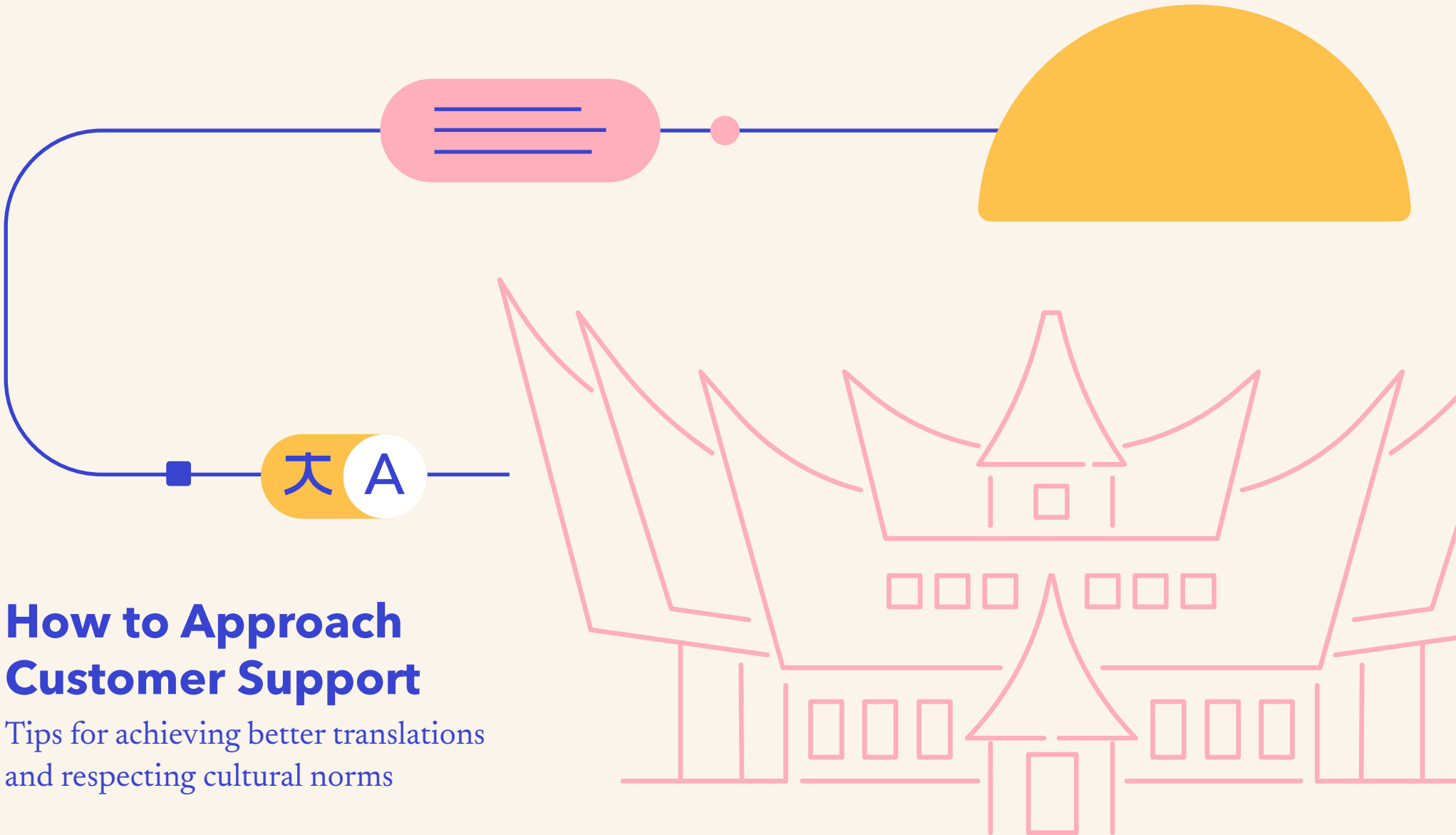


# INDONESIAN



## 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 Indonesian customers and the basic nuances that would work for Indonesian speakers from all over the world.



# About the Indonesian language

Indonesia is one of the most linguistically diverse countries in the world, with over 700 indigenous local languages. Indonesian (locally known as Bahasa Indonesia), which is a standardized variety of Malay and an attempt to unify all these variants, is the official language. It's one of the most widely spoken languages in the world, used by more than 200 million people in Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Brunei. Apart from these countries, speakers of Indonesian can also be found in Thailand, East Timor, Australia, Sri Lanka, South Africa, and elsewhere.

SELAMAT

SIANG

PAGI

Indonesia consists of over 17,000 islands. While Indonesian is the national language, most Indonesians are fluent in one other language from among the roughly 700 languages spoken in the archipelago, like Javanese, Sundanese, and Balinese.



# Core concepts in Indonesian culture relevant to customer service

## FACE

The concept of “face” is a priority to the Indonesian, 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.

## HARMONY

Indonesia is a collectivistic society – this means that Indonesians consider themselves to be members of a group (more than as individuals) in both family and business, and loyalty to the group comes first. Harmony is one of their guiding principles, and working in harmony is considered vital to productivity. This is closely tied with saving one’s own face and also the face of those around them: Indonesians believe in being indirect, polite, and gentle even in disagreement. This also impacts their social behavior. Indonesians rarely do things or go places by themselves, and privacy does not have the same value as it does in Western countries.

## RESTRAINT

The Indonesian society does not prioritize gratification of desires; in fact, this is strictly regulated by social norms. Indonesians act deliberately and with restraint to protect their self-worth and peer perception. They usually conduct themselves conservatively, because they don’t want to lose face by doing something inappropriate. This also reflects in their attitude of humility and aversion to boastfulness.



Bear in mind that Indonesia is one of the most populous and diverse countries in the world, so this overview might not apply to every individual.



# Best practices for communicating with Indonesian customers

## AMBIGUITY IS THE NORM

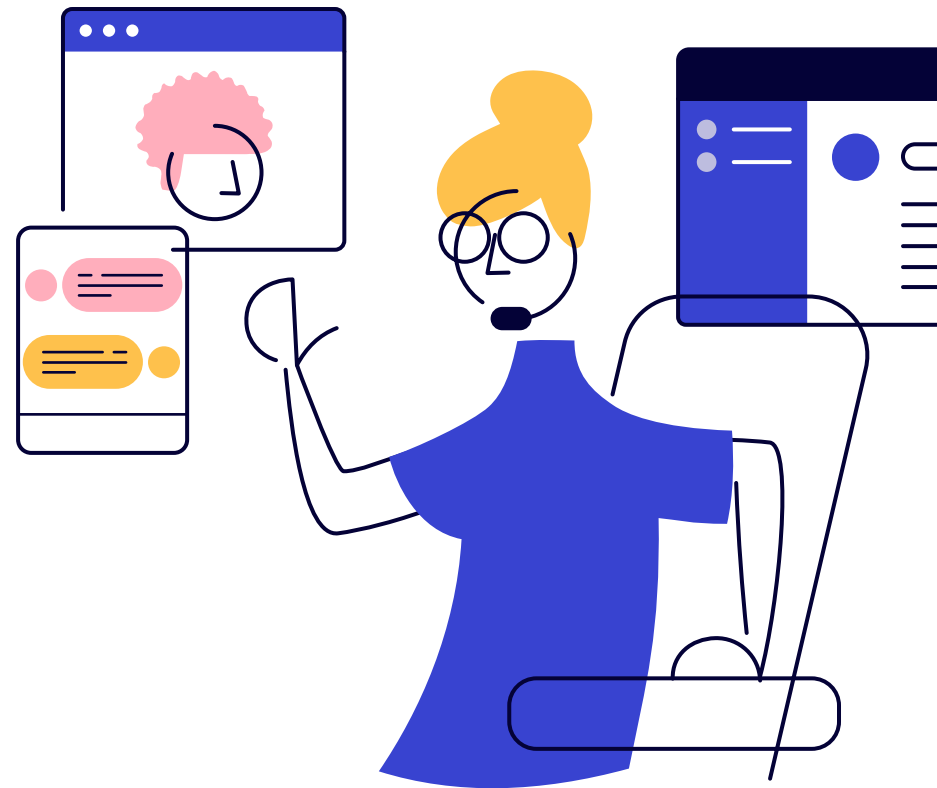
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The concept of face has an impact on the typical Indonesian communication style: Indonesians are reluctant to disagree or say no, so they tend to be indirect and ambiguous when expressing concerns. Understated points, softened corrective remarks, and general hesitation are signs that they're trying to avoid a loss of face on either side of the conversation. A boisterous, intimidating attitude might make them shut down or just seemingly agree with you on everything. Check for clarification multiple times with open-ended questions.

## RELATIONSHIPS ARE THE FOUNDATION

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Good rapport is crucial to earning your Indonesian customer's trust. If you seem aggressive or in a hurry to get to matters at hand, you might not be able to win your customer's loyalty. Instead, taking a special interest in the customer and letting them lead the conversation will go a long way in establishing a strong relationship. Show compassion, be personable, and help them save face during your conversation. Indonesians are polite and respectful; echoing this and letting them speak without interruption will help them voice their thoughts freely.

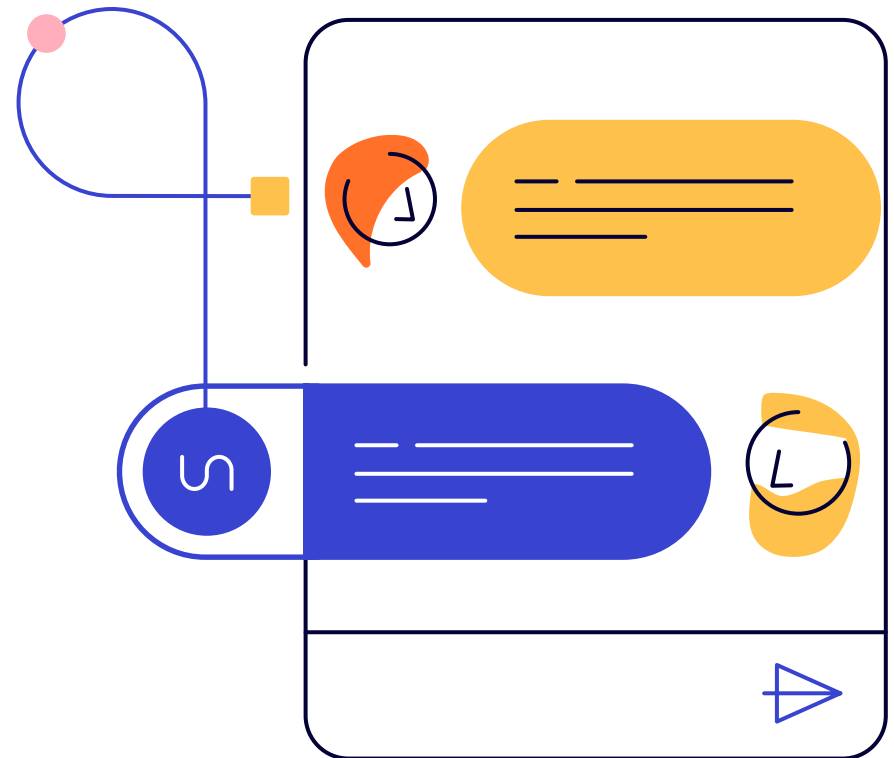


# Best practices for communicating with Vietnamese customers

## EXPERIENCE MATTERS MORE THAN OUTCOME

Indonesians prioritize the experience they get when they seek support over the actual outcome. What matters most to them is that they had a smooth, mutually respectful interaction. Again, face plays an important role here. Begin your conversation by presenting yourself clearly. High-pressure tactics and insistence will simply turn them off. Indonesians also enjoy bargaining and negotiation. If they're given freebies and concessions right away, they consider it to be a sign of naïveté. Verbal agreements are considered very important, and if you make promises and keep them, you'll gain their respect and trust.

Indonesians like to take things in a relaxed pace. The phrase "jam karet" literally translates to "rubber time" and means that time is a flexible, uncertain resource. Patience is crucial, waiting is common, conversations might stretch for hours, and schedules could easily be disregarded.



# Best practices for optimizing machine translation output

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

## 1 USE FORMAL GREETINGS AND CLOSINGS

In Indonesian customer support, the informal register is never used. Instead, use a formal tone.

### GREETINGS

#### not advised

- Dear John,
- Dear Jane,
- Hello, John here.\*

#### advised

- Dear Mr. Smith,
- Dear Ms. Jane,

### PRESENTING YOURSELF

#### not advised

- My name is Jessica. I will assist you today.

#### advised

- Thank you for contacting us. I am Jessica and I will be assisting you with any questions or concerns you have.

\* Never use this expression.

### CLOSINGS

#### not advised

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

#### advised

- Best regards,
- Yours sincerely,





# How to write in English for Indonesian machine translation

## 2 AVOID EMOJIS

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### not advised

- Good morning, Stefannie :)

### advised

- Good morning, Stefannie.

## 3 AVOID INTERJECTIONS

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Interjections should be avoided when writing to an Indonesian audience since they 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

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There are some English expressions that might come off as rude or inappropriate in this specific culture, so avoid using them.

### not advised

- Have a good time!
- It was nice working with you.
- You don't have to worry.

### advised

- It was a pleasure to help you.
- Thank you for contacting us.
- We appreciate your understanding.
- We apologize for the inconvenience.



# 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.

