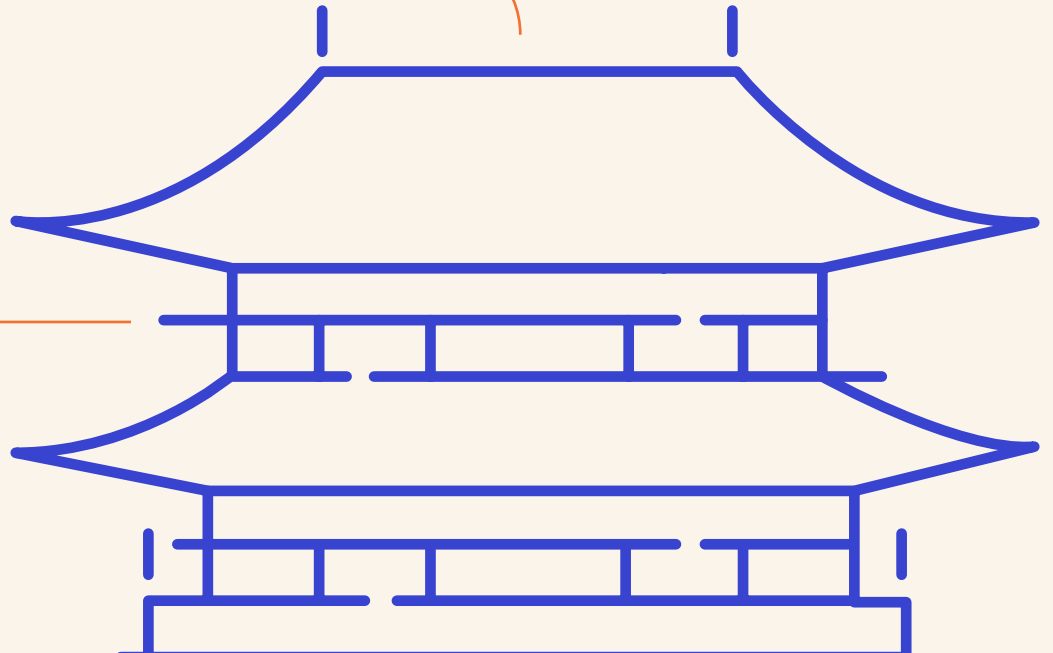
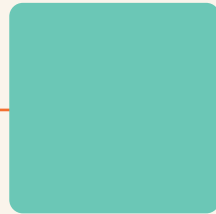
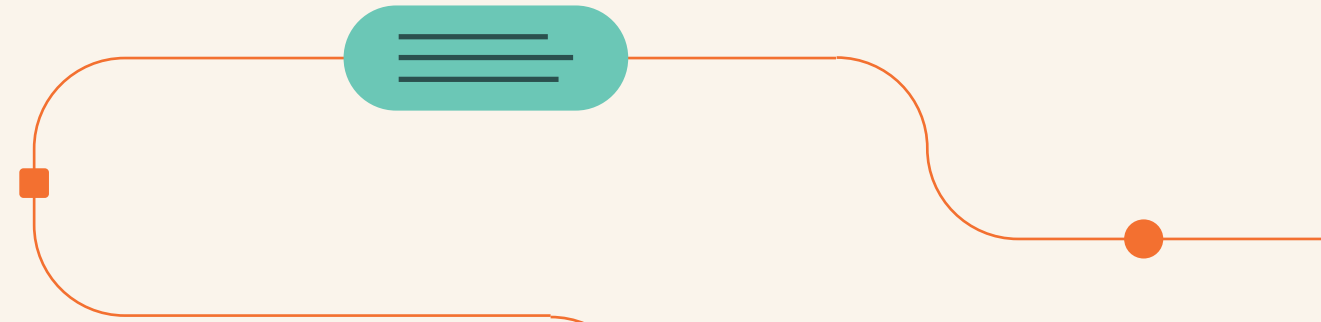


# KOREAN

大 A



## How to Approach Customer Support

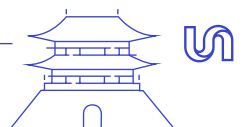
Tips for achieving better translations and respecting cultural norms

# 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 Korean language.



# About the Korean language

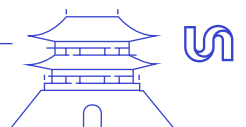
Approximately 77 million people speak Korean as their native language, primarily concentrated (more than 60 million speakers) in North and South Korea. It is also spoken in parts of Russia, China, and Central Asia. In the United States alone, there are more than 900,000 speakers. The Korean language has nine different dialects. Despite the many versions, the fundamental rules of the Korean language remain consistent.

In this guide, we lay out the best practices for communicating with Korean customers, and the basic nuances would work for Korean speakers from all over the world.

ANNYEONG  
HASEYO

ANNYEONG

HASIMNIKKA



# Core concepts in Korean culture relevant to customer service

## HIGH CONTEXT

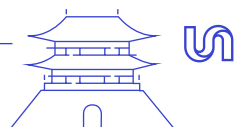
Unlike low-context cultures like the US, Germany, and UK, Koreans do not speak much. In Korean communication, like in many other Asian cultures, there is an abundance of implicitness. This requires participants to be formal and not direct. It's not just the message that matters, but also the tone and delivery.

## HARMONY

Koreans prize Confucianism, which emphasizes harmony and egalitarianism. Other aspects of Confucianism are not standing out and saving face if possible. This explains why Koreans prefer to avoid confrontation and directness. They also tend to be apprehensive about any communication. Explicit communication is shunned – not taking a stand or obscuring their message is common among Koreans. However, younger generations in Korea are highly westernized and individualistic, and are rejecting such traditional notions. That said, Confucianism still has a certain level of influence on Korean culture.

## KIBUN

Another concept closely tied to harmony is kibun. Kibun has no direct English translation, but it loosely means pride, face, mood, feelings, or state of mind. If you hurt someone's kibun, you hurt their pride and dignity and make them lose face. Telling a "white lie" to preserve peace is more preferable to being honest and hurting others' feelings. In Korean culture, you're expected to judge the state of others' minds and avoid hurting their kibun, while also maintaining your own equilibrium.



# Best practices for communicating with Korean customers

## WAIT FOR YOUR TURN TO SPEAK

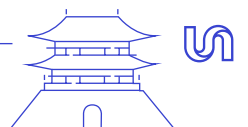
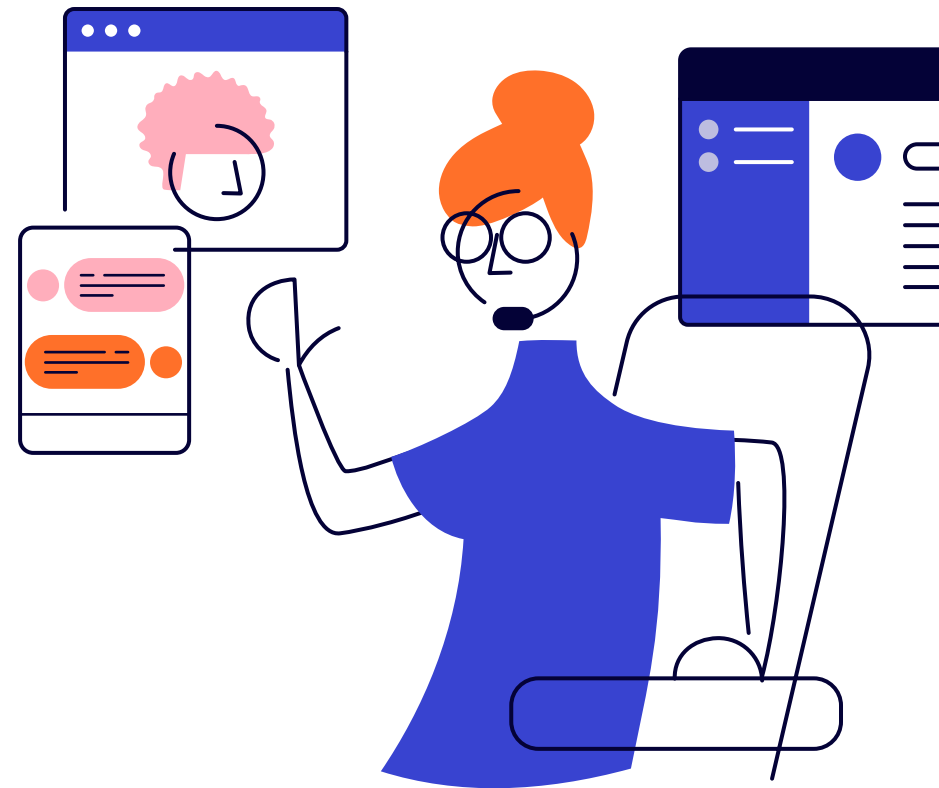
---

Koreans are respectful listeners and know how to best participate in discussions. Manners and respect are at the top of their checklist when assessing other people. Reflect this attitude and give them your undivided attention when they're sharing information with you. Koreans also take time to process what's been said before saying something, so don't rush in to fill the silence. But if they take too long to contemplate aspects of the conversation, it's acceptable to gently nudge them back to the topic at hand.

## DON'T TAKE LACK OF PROTEST AS AGREEMENT

---

Koreans are generally hesitant to offer criticism and decline. If they don't reject your offer outright, it's probably because they're focused on maintaining harmony. If their answers aren't clear enough, don't jump to the conclusion that they're on the same page as you. Ask them open-ended questions to double-check and wait for them to clarify on their own terms.



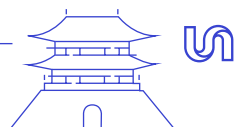
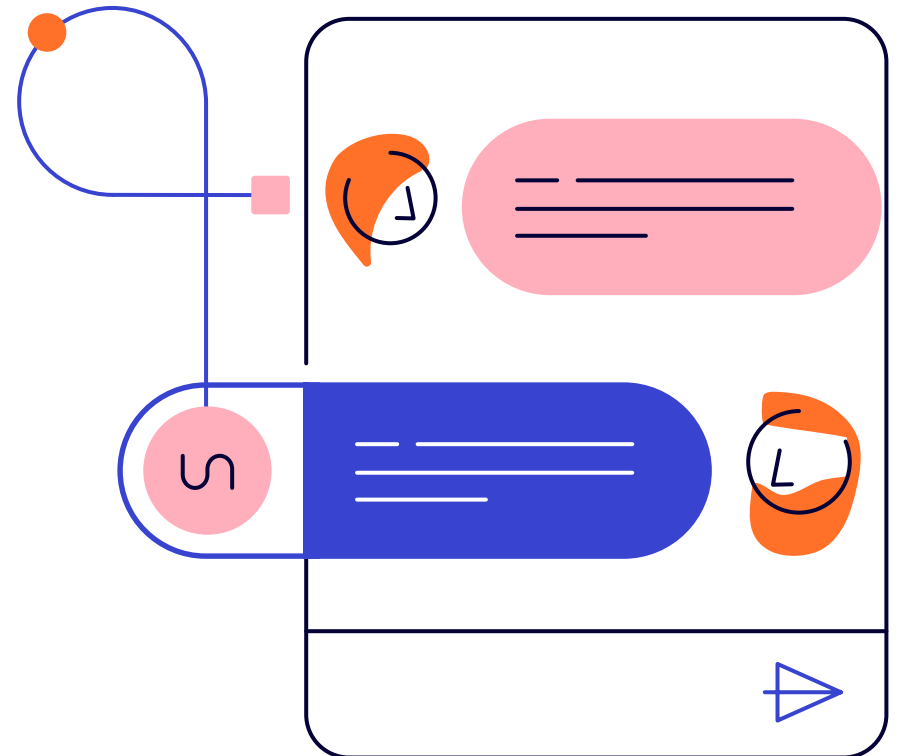
# Best practices for communicating with Korean customers

## BE POLITE AT ALL TIMES

The list of things that could offend Koreans is a short one: aggressive interactions, heated displays of negative emotions, open criticism, hard-sell tactics, arm-twisting. There's a clear pattern in these, and all you need to do is understand their culture and simply return their courtesy. They're adaptable and innovative, and expect you to be forgiving of mistakes and accepting of last-minute changes during a process. Appreciate that they're creative and willing to take risks when they start trusting you, your product, or your service.

## RESPECT THEIR TIME

In spite of all that's said above, Koreans are quick to wrap up meetings, because they don't like to waste time. You might find meetings ending exactly on time or even earlier. When speaking to them about your product or service, you might want to do some research and go in with a clear agenda, so you don't spend their time inefficiently.

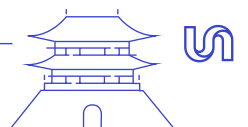


# Best practices for optimizing machine translation output

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

## 1 USE FORMAL GREETINGS AND CLOSINGS

Korean customer support is characterized by a more formal tone.

### GREETINGS

#### not advised

- Hello Peter,
- Hello Mr. Smith,
- I hope this email finds you well.

#### advised

- Dear customer,
- Dear Peter Smith,
- Hello customer,
- This is [your company's name] support team.

### CLOSINGS

#### not advised

- With kind regards,
- Yours sincerely,

#### advised

- Thank you and have a great day.

## 2 AVOID EMOJIS

#### not advised

- Good morning, Stefannie :)

#### advised

- Good morning, Stefannie.

## 3 AVOID INTERJECTIONS

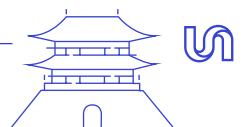
Interjections should be avoided when writing to a Korean audience because it can be perceived as rude.

#### not advised

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

#### advised

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





# How to write in English for Korean machine translation

## 4 AVOID THESE EXPRESSIONS

While some expressions might be common in English, they are not very much used in Korean. It's important to be aware of them and avoid using them.

### not advised

- Have a good time!
- It was nice working with you.\*
- Don't worry!
- I am happy that [...]\*
- By the way, I hope that [...]\*
- Thank you for sharing your concern.

\*Do not use the first person "I" or the third person "it"

### advised

- Thank you for contacting us/[your company's name] support team. We apologize for any concerns we might have caused.

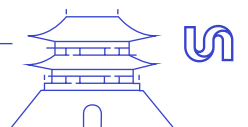
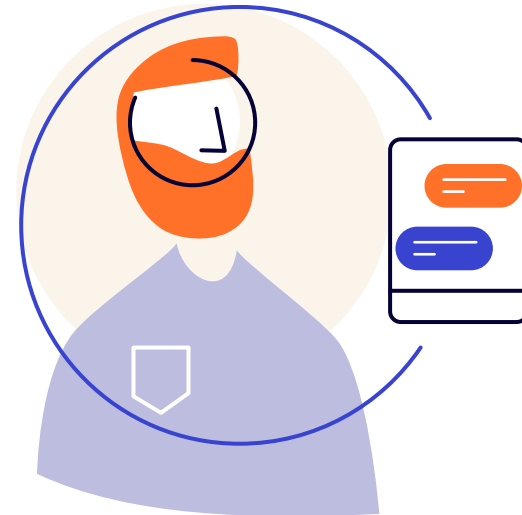
If you want to thank the end customer for the patience and the time spent on solving the problem, expressions that are culturally appropriate should be used:

### not advised

- I really appreciate your time and patience throughout the process.

### advised

- I really appreciate your time throughout the process.



# The Golden Rules of Customer Service

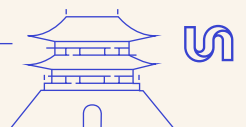


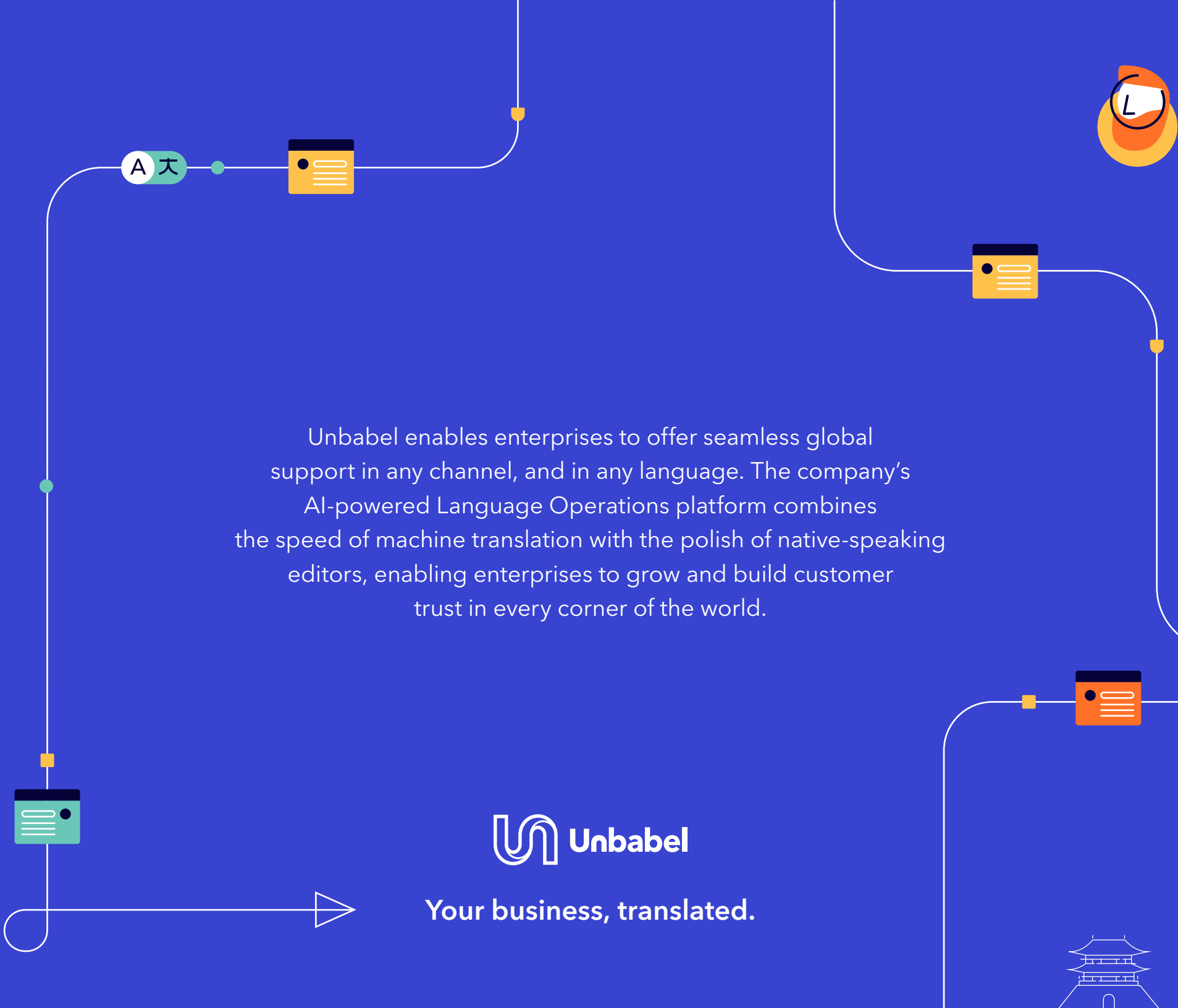
Of course, some best practices do not vary by language and should be applied to every customer service interaction. Here are the nine best practices we recommend.

- 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.**