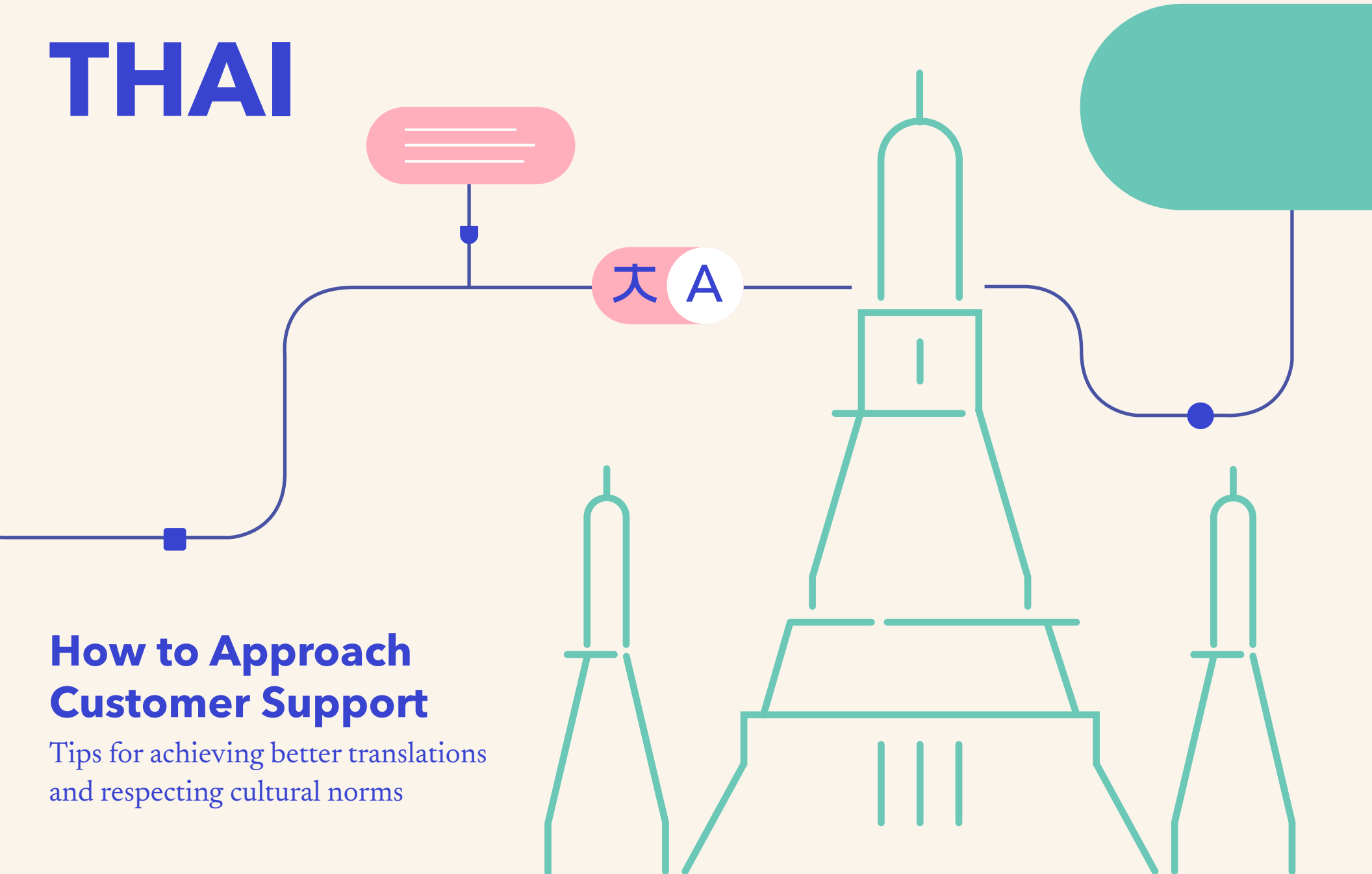


THAI



How to Approach Customer Support

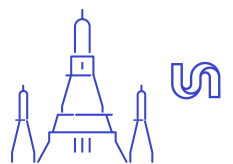
Tips for achieving better translations and respecting cultural norms

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 Thai language.



About the Thai language

Thai is the national language and de facto official language in Thailand. It is estimated that approximately 50 million people around the world speak this language, including 85% of the population throughout Thailand and small groups of people in the United States, United Arab Emirates, and Singapore. Thai generally refers to Central Thai, spoken by the people in Central, Southwestern, and Eastern Thailand as well as a vast majority of Thai Chinese. It's the principal language of education and government. Similar to Chinese and Vietnamese, Thai is a tonal language: Tones are used to distinguish words or their inflections, like vowels and consonants.

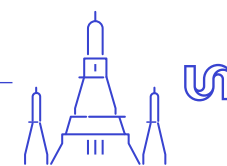


Northern Thai and Southern Thai share limited mutual intelligibility with Central Thai, but most linguists classify these as separate languages.

The Thai government treats all three as dialects of the same language to promote unity in the country.

SA-WAS
-DEE

SABAI DEE MAI?



Core concepts in Thai culture relevant to customer service

FACE

The concept of “face” is a priority to Thai people, 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. Pointing someone’s mistakes or calling them a liar (in front of others) will make them lose face. Being appreciative and gentle with feedback privately will help them save face.

HARMONY

In spite of Thailand’s reputation among many Western tourists as a party destination, Thai society is quite modest and conservative. To preserve harmony with those around them and show everyone the respect they deserve, Thai people exhibit restraint in the way they present

themselves. A harmonious, forgiving attitude is the norm among the Thai people. This also connects back to saving face and preserving their self-worth. Respect is a cornerstone in Buddhism, one of the major influences on Thai culture.

COLLECTIVISM

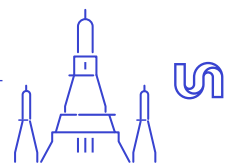
The concept of the individual is powerless when compared to the collective. Thai people see themselves as part of a larger group, like family, community, and country. The words “I” and “me” are rarely used; more often than not, they address themselves in terms of their relationship. They place a strong emphasis on loyalty: Honoring and being loyal toward family, friends, or community will override social rules if circumstances demand it. The Thai people rarely jeopardize the interests of their collective group. Very often, they take responsibility for their fellow members.

SANUK

Thai people have a strong work ethic, but they also know how to derive pleasure from it. Sanuk is generally translated to “fun.” For the Thai people, fun and enjoyment are a must in everything they set out to do – and they bring playfulness to even the most mundane interaction. Even if it’s work or a business meeting, they strive to achieve satisfaction and joy. A good sense of humor can go a long way in Thai culture.



Most times, Thai people respond to thanks or apology with “mai pen rai.” It’s usually translated to “never mind,” but the expression reflects the Thai people’s attitude to life itself: It relates to the acceptance that things are not in our control sometimes and that’s all right.



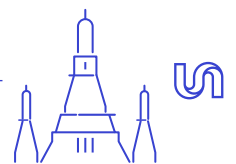
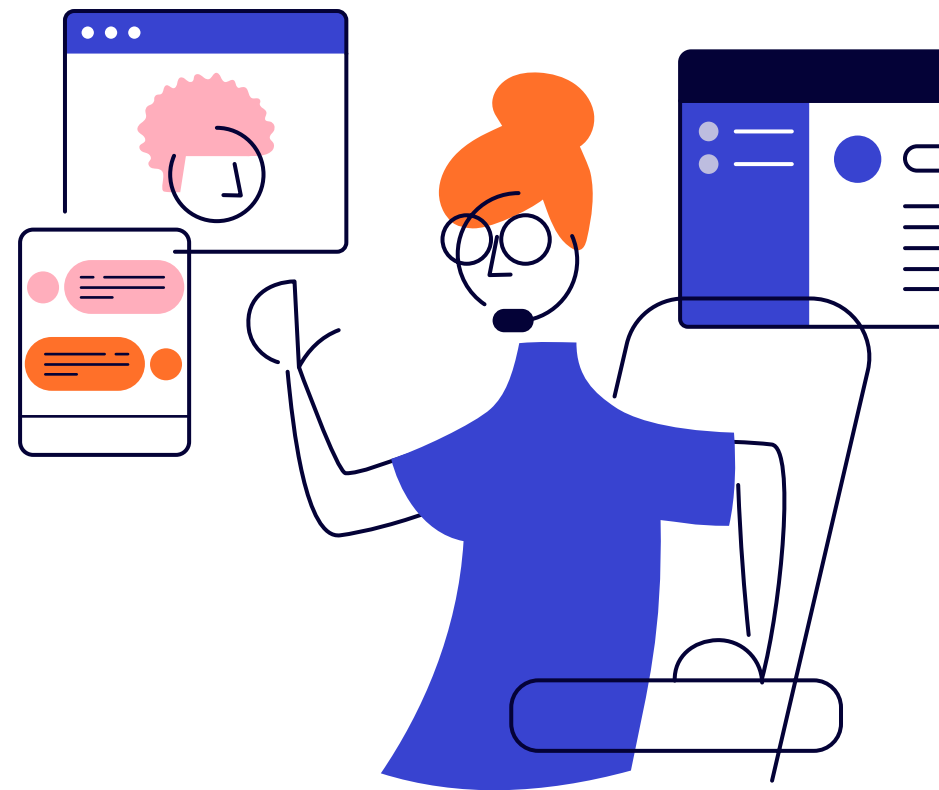
Best practices for communicating with Thai customers

FOCUS ON THEIR LOYALTY

Thai people put a lot of thought into choosing a brand, product, or service. Once they've selected a preferred brand, they're known to be very loyal to it, even if the price is high. This means that they also expect superior customer service from their chosen brands. This characteristic of the discerning Thai customer is a great opportunity to leverage brand equity. To retain your Thai customer, make sure to help them save face and make the customer experience enjoyable overall with a light, harmonious, and respectful tone. Indicating that you recognize and appreciate their loyalty is a good starting point.

WIN THEM OVER WITH INDIRECT COMMUNICATION

Also tied to the concept of face, subtle and indirect communication is preferred to blunt statements. A yes from them might mean simply understanding what they've heard and not necessarily agreement. Before you think you're on the same page as them, make sure to dig deeper with open-ended questions and confirm their stance. While the Thai demeanor is quite warm, it is important not to characterize them as pushovers. Keep your interactions gentle and helpful: Strong statements, harsh criticism, arm-twisting tactics, and any kind of negative emotions are a strict no-no.



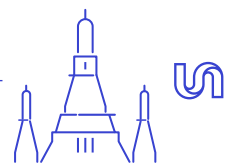
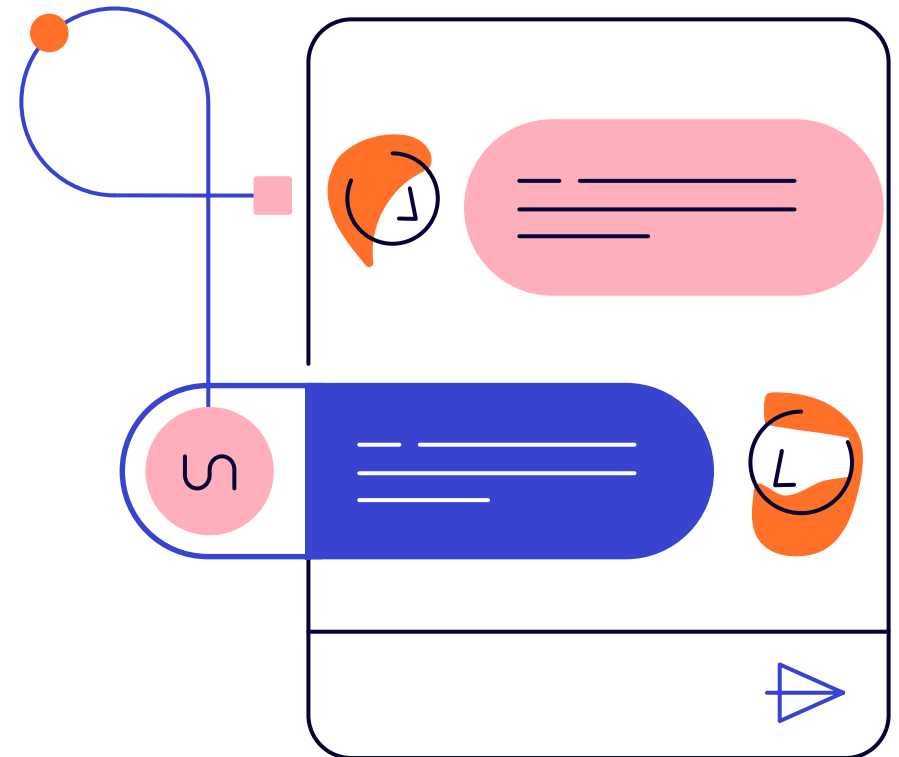
Best practices for communicating with Thai customers

BUILD RELATIONSHIPS WITH HUMOR

When interacting with your Thai customer, make sure to indulge in small talk (when they initiate it). Humor and playfulness are welcome, so try to inject some fun and lightheartedness into your conversation. The experience is more important to them than the outcome, so it's crucial to make sure they have a good experience connecting with customer support. However, it's important to also recognize boundaries. Swearing is considered crass, and jokes about their culture and the King are not tolerated. Your Thai customer will generally be courteous to you and will expect the same politeness in return.



Remember that the perception of Thailand promoted by the tourism industry is not the same as your customer. They might be fun-loving, but they're still part of a conservative and modest society.

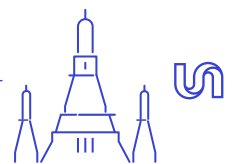


Best practices for optimizing machine translation output

When writing in English with the knowledge that the content will be translated into Thai, 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 Stick to English grammar rules
- 8 Be consistent, especially with terms like "email" that can be written multiple ways
- 9 Stick to English grammar rules
- 10 Ensure no spaces are missing
- 11 User proper punctuation and capitalization
- 12 Finish all sentences (do not use fragments)
- 13 Avoid double subjects (e.g., the noun and a pronoun referencing it)
- 14 Ensure the word order is correct
- 15 Check for subject-verb agreement (person and number in singular/plural) and pronoun agreement (person, gender, and number)
- 16 Format messages correctly (e.g., with no extra line breaks, bullets or asterisks)



Best practices specific to English-Thai machine translation

1 USE THE FORMAL AND INFORMAL TONES CORRECTLY

In Thai, both the formal and informal tones are used in customer support. However, they require different rules.

FORMAL REGISTER

GREETINGS

not advised

- Hi/Hey!
- How are you?
- How was your day today?

advised

- Dear Mr. /Ms. /Mrs. Smith

CLOSINGS

not advised

- Goodbye!
- See you!
- Have a great day!
- It was nice working with you.

advised

- With kind regards,
- Yours sincerely,

INFORMAL REGISTER

GREETINGS

not advised

- How are you?
- How was your day today?

advised

- Hi John,
- Hello,

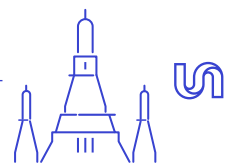
CLOSINGS

not advised

- Goodbye!
- See you!
- Have a great day!
- It was nice working with you.

advised

- Best regards,



Best practices specific to English-Thai machine translation

2 AVOID EMOJIS

not advised

- Good morning, Stefannie :)

advised

- Good morning, Stefannie.

3 AVOID INTERJECTIONS

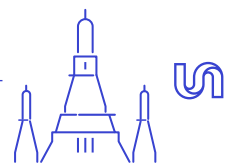
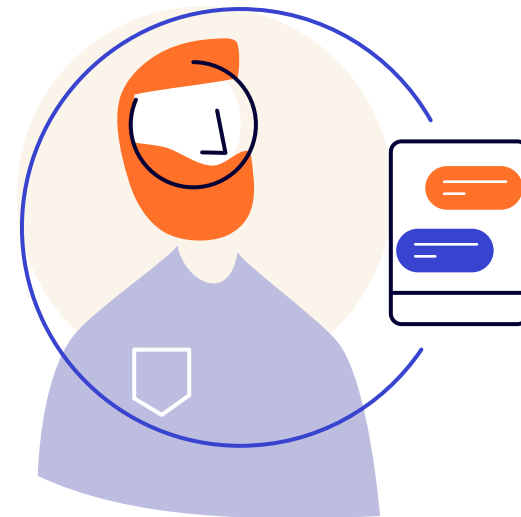
Interjections are another marker for the informal tone of voice and should be avoided when writing to a Thai audience.

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

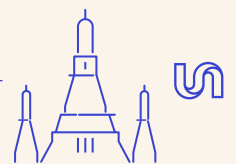


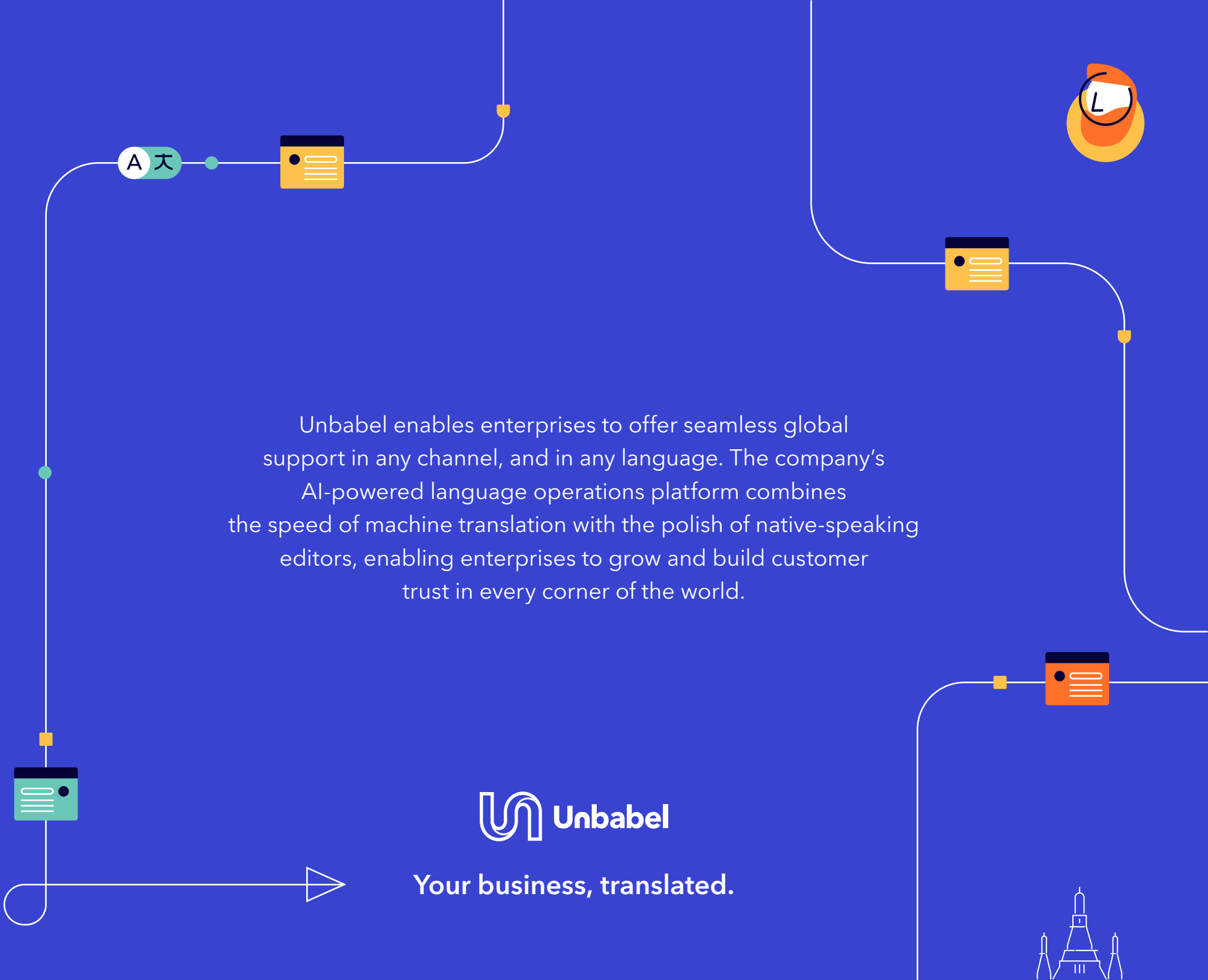
Of course, some best practices do not vary by language and should be applied to every customer service interaction. Here are the nine best practices we recommend.

- 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.

