

VIETNAMESE



How to Approach Customer Support

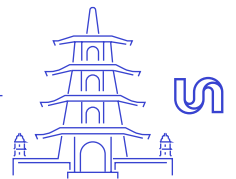
Tips for achieving better translations and respecting cultural norms

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 Vietnamese language.



About the Vietnamese language

Vietnamese (formerly known as Annamese) is one of the Austroasiatic languages – the family of 169 languages spoken across Southeast Asia. With around 76 million native speakers, Vietnamese is the most widely spoken Austroasiatic language.

Its vocabulary has been significantly influenced by Chinese and French. It is the official language of Vietnam, and a minority language in Czech Republic. Vietnamese speakers can also be found in Australia, Cambodia, Canada, China, United Kingdom, U.S.A, and in several other countries.

Vietnamese has three mutually intelligible dialects:

HANOI, accepted as the standard
(Northern)

HUẾ (Central)

SAIGON (Southern)



How do you say "HELLO" in Vietnamese?

**"XIN CHÀO" + GIVEN NAME
+ TITLE**

is the politest way to do it.
You can use it to greet anybody!



Core concepts in Vietnamese culture relevant to customer service

CONFUCIANISM

Confucianism, more a philosophy than a religion, is a pillar to the Vietnamese society. It defines a code of social behavior: People must live in perfect harmony with society and attain happiness in their individual lives. It regulates their relationships with others, establishing family as the fundamental unit. However, that said, the flexibility and openness of a modern and rapidly developing society has been loosening the grip of Confucianism on social behavior.

COLLECTIVISM

The concept of the individual is powerless when compared to the collective. The Vietnamese 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, the Vietnamese address themselves in terms of their relationship. For example, they might address an older person of higher status and an older brother with the same word.

MODESTY (KHIÊM)

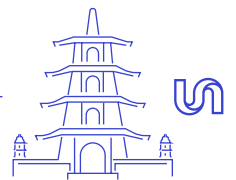
The Vietnamese are selective and thoughtful with their apologies and gratitude. They only tend to do either when they’re sure that the other person deserves it. When the Vietnamese bump into someone or when they’re offered compliments, they might not respond with a casual “sorry” or “thanks.” But this is not rudeness; this is because they value sincerity, virtuousness, and humility. Automatic responses that acknowledge minor courtesies or phrases uttered casually, such as “thanks,” “excuse me,” etc., can be viewed as disrespectful.

FACE

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



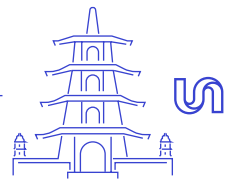
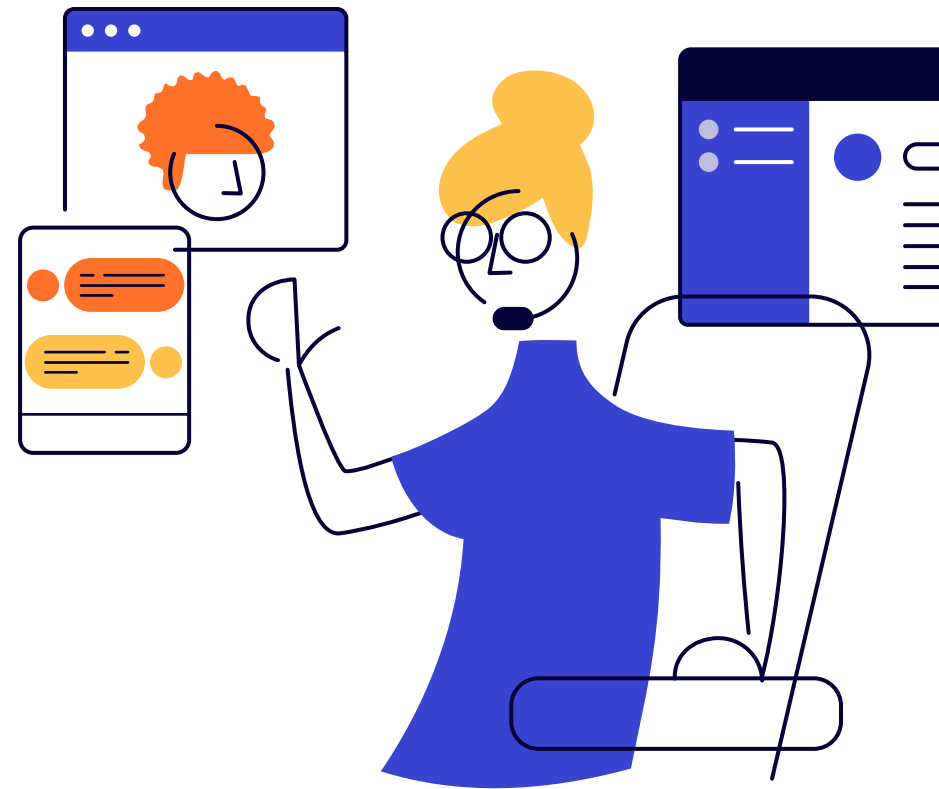
Best practices for communicating with Vietnamese customers

YES MIGHT NOT MEAN YES

Don't be quick to accept "yes" as agreement. In the Vietnamese culture, "yes" might also mean "I hear you" or "I understand." In fact, they're quicker to respond with a "yes" than with a "no" – the concept of "face" makes them avoid a direct disagreement or confrontation, even if they disagree with you. Instead of taking their statements at face value, use open-ended questions to dig deeper. Silence is also preferred to open disagreement.

COMMUNICATION IS A JOURNEY

Vietnamese communication relies on understated, emotionally balanced, and indirect language. For example, they'd replace "love" with "like," "awful" with "bad," and "awesome" with "good." But while the Vietnamese reach their point by avoiding superlatives and colorful, explicitly descriptive vocabulary, they also provide strong clues in other ways. Look to the context and tone of the conversation to uncover further meaning to their words.



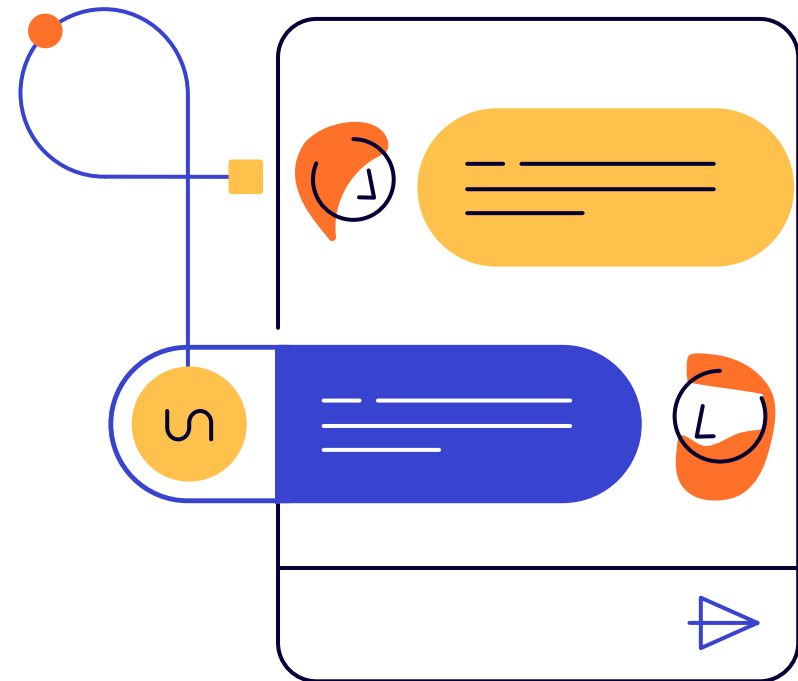
Best practices for communicating with Vietnamese customers

RELATIONSHIPS, NOT TRANSACTIONS

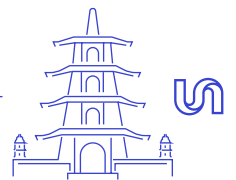
Expect small talk in conversations with your Vietnamese customers. While efficiency is important, the Vietnamese culture expects you to build trust with careful attention. The Vietnamese are also endlessly optimistic – nothing is considered impossible to them. So when they say something is impossible, it could mean that they don't have a definitive answer yet or you have to work harder for their interest. Do your best to match their optimism, and make sure to handle disagreements in the most discreet, private way possible.

WAR IS ALWAYS OFF-LIMITS

The Vietnamese consider their war history sacrosanct. Don't bring up the topic of war or their war heroes. The Vietnamese enjoy humor, but they don't joke about the war years – they were difficult times for the country, just like their colonial past. They might complain about their country, but they don't like outsiders doing that. Never convey that another country is better than Vietnam in any way.



To give your Vietnamese customer a positive experience, help them save face, show humility by drawing attention away from yourself, and build trust by keeping your promises.

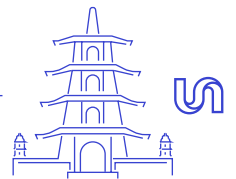


Best practices for optimizing machine translation output

When writing in English with the knowledge that the content will be translated into Vietnamese, 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)



Best practices specific to English-Vietnamese machine translation

1 USE FORMAL AND INFORMAL GREETINGS AND CLOSINGS CORRECTLY

In Vietnamese customer support, business formal and business informal tones are both appropriate. The examples below show you how to use each tone.

BUSINESS FORMAL

GREETINGS

not advised

- Hi/Hello, Peter
- Respectfully addressed to Mr. Smith

advised

- Dear Peter,
- Dear Mr. Smith,
- Dear customer,

CLOSINGS

not advised

- Bye!
- See you!

advised

- Best regards,
- Thanks and best regards,

BUSINESS INFORMAL

GREETINGS

not advised

- Respectfully addressed to Mr. Smith

advised

- Dear Peter, (always use the customer's first name)
- Hi/Hello, Peter

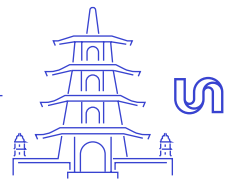
CLOSINGS

not advised

- Bye!
- See you!

advised

- Best regards,



Best practices specific to English-Vietnamese machine translation

1 USE FORMAL AND INFORMAL GREETINGS AND CLOSINGS CORRECTLY

When writing to your customer for the first time, follow these examples.

not advised

- I hope this email finds you well.
- Hello, Jane's here.

advised

BUSINESS FORMAL

- First of all, [your company's name] support would like to send our warm greetings to you.

BUSINESS INFORMAL

- Hello, I'm Jane from [your company's name] support. Thank you for contacting us.

Some expressions might not be appropriate according to the register you are using. They might come off as rude or inappropriate in a specific register, while being completely acceptable in another register.

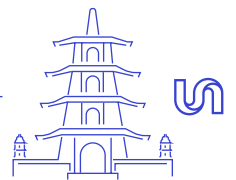
BUSINESS FORMAL

not advised

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

advised

- Thank you for sharing your concern.
- Thank you for contacting us.
- It was a pleasure to help you.



Best practices specific to English-Vietnamese machine translation

1 USE FORMAL AND INFORMAL GREETINGS AND CLOSINGS CORRECTLY

BUSINESS INFORMAL

not advised

- It was a pleasure to help you.

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- How are you?
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- I am happy that [...]
- By the way, I hope that [...]
- Thank you for sharing your concern.
- Thank you for contacting us.

2 AVOID EMOJIS

not advised

- Good morning, Stefannie :)

advised

- Good morning, Stefannie.

3 AVOID INTERJECTIONS

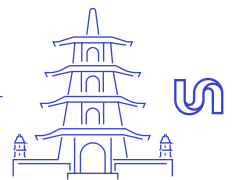
Interjections should be avoided when writing to a Vietnamese audience because it can be perceived as rude.

not advised

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

advised

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



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.



Unbabel

Your business, translated.

