

Cross-Border Translation of Academic Documents: A Comparative Analysis of French–English and Ugandan Retranslations

Enoch Sebuyungu^{1,*} 

¹ Makerere University, P.O. Box 7062, Kampala, Uganda

Received: 10 / 12 / 2025

Accepted: 04 / 01 / 2026

Published: 15 / 01 / 2026

Abstract

Although underexplored in Africa, cross-border translation of academic documents is vital for examining translation practice and theory. Through a Skopos theoretical lens, this study analyses the Ugandan retranslation of academic papers in French that were initially translated into English from their source francophone countries. The objectives include examining lexical, syntactic, and stylistic variations in the translations and retranslations of academic documents; identifying sociocultural factors that influence translation decisions; and identifying best practices for cross-border academic document translation. It is argued that a functionalist approach is essential for enabling translators to assimilate the source into the target, aligning with the target culture's values and ensuring the message resonates with the target audience. A purposive sample of 18 source, translated, and retranslated documents, dating from 2001 to 2022, was selected. The corpus from three francophone countries covers school certificates, academic transcripts, and degree certificates. Five translators and six administrator end-users were also interviewed regarding the effectiveness of corpus examples in translation. The insights from these reflections show that the francophone source-country translations tended to be excessively source-oriented, prioritizing literal fidelity over the communicative needs of Ugandan administrative systems, which target-country translators can best understand. The Ugandan retranslations are target-oriented and align with Skopos theory to produce functional translations that meet the expectations of educational administrators who make decisions about student academic documents.

Keywords: Academic documents, cross-border translation, Skopos, functionalist approach, French, English

Cite as

Sebuyungu, E. (2026). Cross-Border Translation of Academic Documents: A Comparative Analysis of French–English and Ugandan Retranslations. *Atras Journal*, 7(1), 389-402.
<https://doi.org/10.70091/Atras/vol07no01.27>

* Corresponding author's email: ¹enoch.sebuyungo@mak.ac.ug

Introduction

Translation is a critical mediator in cross-border communication, particularly when individuals move between educational, business, and legal systems. In Africa, where multilingualism intersects with colonial legacies, translation plays a crucial role in the administrative and economic sectors (Bandia, 2005). Francophone countries produce administrative texts in French that must be rendered into English for use in Anglophone Uganda (Sebuyungo, 2021).

In the context of globalization and academic mobility, cross-border translation of educational certificates is a complex task that involves navigating diverse linguistic and cultural issues. However, accurate translation of educational documents is indispensable for higher education admissions. (Mayoral, 2003; Lambert-Tierrafría, 2007; Akpaca, 2020; Andújar & Vargas-Urpí, 2022). Students from Francophone Africa often apply to Ugandan institutions, submitting academic certificates and transcripts for translation into English. (Sebuyungo, 2021) There are, however, a few cases in which these documents are submitted along with English translations from the source country. However, these translations are sometimes retranslated in Uganda by official translators such as the Makerere University Centre for Language and Communication Services to meet the expectations of local institutions and ensure usability in the target context. (Akpaca, 2020; Sebuyungo, 2021). Cross-border translation of academic documents is challenging due to cultural and linguistic differences. Consequently, translation must balance linguistic equivalence, cultural context, and functional adaptation (Relinque & Lobato, 2025).

This phenomenon of translation and retranslation raises critical questions: what differences emerge between source-country translations and target-country retranslations? How do sociocultural and administrative factors influence translation choices? Moreover, what implications do these differences have for best practices in cross-border academic translation? This study investigates these issues through a comparative, qualitative analysis of a corpus of 18 documents (6 French originals, 6 English translations produced in Francophone countries, and six retranslations into English by Ugandan translators).

While translations of academic documents serve as key instruments in cross-border recognition of qualifications, they are not always functionally equivalent across contexts (Akpaca, 2020). Source-country translators may prioritize local conventions, while Ugandan translators often retranslate to meet administrative expectations, terminological standards, and the equivalence requirements of the Ugandan educational system.

This dual translation process can produce lexical, syntactic, and stylistic divergences that risk inconsistency or even the rejection of valid qualifications. Despite its practical significance, there is limited scholarly research on translation–rettranslation practices in African higher education contexts. This study addresses the gap by comparing source-country translations with Ugandan retranslations to uncover underlying factors and inform best practices.

The general objective of the study was to compare French–English translations of academic documents produced in Francophone countries with retranslations into English carried out in Uganda, to identify linguistic and sociocultural differences that impact cross-border translation practices. In this regard, the following research questions are set:

1. What are the lexical, syntactic, and stylistic variations in the translations and retranslations of academic documents?
2. What are the sociocultural and administrative factors that influence translation decisions?
3. What are the best practices for academic document translation in cross-border contexts?

Theoretical Framework

The study was guided by Skopos theory, propounded by Vermeer in 1978. According to Skopos (1978), the purpose of the source text must be considered and reproduced in the target text. This means the translation is target-oriented, conveying the ST's intention in the TL culture

while ensuring functional equivalence. As highlighted by Nedainova (2021), Skopos theory reconceptualizes translation by centering the purpose and the target audience's needs. Its key innovation is shifting authority from the source text to the translator, who creates the translation with its intended function in mind and brings the client's goals to the forefront. Skopos theory is helpful for this study because it highlights the purpose-driven nature of retranslation for Ugandan administrative use. Within a functionalist approach, this theory entails an orientation towards the target culture and the translation's purpose. Skopos has been used by Akpaca (2020) to analyze problems of equivalence in the translation of academic certificates, and by Relinque and Lobato (2025) to translate American academic certificates from English into Spanish.

Research Design and Methodology

The study adopted a qualitative research orientation using a case study design. Case studies examine one or a few instances of a phenomenon to provide an in-depth account of the events, relationships, experiences, or processes involved. They help describe a setting, identify key issues, and compare settings to highlight their similarities and differences (Denscombe, 2010).

Data Collection

Data was obtained from:

- (i) eighteen documents: French originals, their Francophone-produced translations into English, and Ugandan retranslations of the same.
- (ii) a Zoom-based online Focus group discussion with five translators.
- (iii) interviews with six Ugandan administrators.

Permission was granted from the Coordinator of the Makerere University Centre for Language and Communication Services (CLCS) to collect samples from its archives. CLCS was purposively selected because it is Uganda's largest and only government-recognised provider of official translation services.

The collected samples were photocopied, and as indicated in table 1, were few because most source francophone countries do not produce English translations of the same document while issuing them.

Table 1. *Samples from CLCS archives*

No.	Francophone Country	Document type	Year of francophone original document in French	Year of francophone source translation into English	Year of Ugandan retranslation into English
1.	Rwanda	High School Certificate	2001	2001	2006
2.	Rwanda	High School Certificate	2005	2005	2011
3.	Algeria	University Bachelor Degree Academic Transcript	2022	2022	2025
4.	Algeria	University Bachelor Degree Certificate	2022	2022	2025
5.	Cameroon	University Bachelor Degree Certificate	2022	2022	2023
6.	Cameroon	University Bachelor Degree Academic Transcript	2022	2022	2023

Permission was granted from the CLCS Coordinator to interview CLCS translators during an online Focus Group Discussion (FGD) held on Zoom. Of the eight French-English translators at CLCS, three opted out and five consented to participate. Four had received linguistic training at the Master's level from France, the UK, Algeria, and Cameroon, and one at the doctoral level from Uganda. They had translation experience ranging from 1 to 20 years.

Prior consent was also obtained from ten administrators before interviewing them. However, some were unavailable for interviews despite repeated attempts to reach them by phone, WhatsApp, and in-person visits to their offices. Consequently, the analysis included perspectives from six administrators. They comprised one officer of the Uganda National Examinations Board (UNEB) and five academic registrars of Makerere University. They were purposively selected because UNEB plays a central role in evaluating foreign qualifications for academic recognition.

In contrast, academic registrars at Makerere University, Uganda's oldest and largest university, are responsible for managing academic records and student admissions, and the university received 450 international undergraduate students for the 2025/26 academic year. In-person interviews were conducted with the UNEB officer and three Academic Registrars, whereas three other Academic Registrars were interviewed by telephone.

During the in-person interviews, the researcher took notes and recorded participant views. During the Zoom FGD, participants consented to being recorded, and the recorded transcript was used to collect data. For all participants, anonymity and confidentiality were ensured throughout data analysis and the presentation of findings.

Data Analysis

Data was analysed based on the three research questions:

- (i) What are the terminological, syntactical, and stylistic variations between source-country translations and Ugandan retractions of academic documents?
- (ii) What are the sociocultural and administrative factors influencing translation decisions?
- (iii) What are the best practices for cross-border translation of academic documents?

data were coded and categorised, and key concepts were derived. Triangulation of the data was also carried out to validate the findings.

Ethical considerations guided the analysis. All archival samples were photocopied and anonymized to protect individual identities, with attention focused solely on their content. Although Table 1 lists six documents, each one comprised three versions: the original French document (coded 'A'), the Francophone English translation ('B'), and the Ugandan English retranslation ('C'), yielding a total of 18 documents. They were labeled 1A, 1B, 1C up to 6A, 6B and 6C. The comparative analysis was conducted using this coding scheme.

Similarly, to ensure confidentiality, participants' names were not disclosed but coded as T1-T5 for the five translators; administrators were also coded as A1-A6.

Findings and Discussion

The findings are presented in accordance with the research questions. However, the three research questions were deeply intertwined, making a separate presentation disjointed and tautological. Lexical, syntactic, stylistic, and sociocultural factors often overlapped, making it difficult to draw clear boundaries between the research questions. The researcher therefore combined the three research questions and the discussion into a single, integrated analysis. This is corroborated by Dobakhti (2013), who argues that merging findings and discussion in qualitative Applied Linguistics research produces a more coherent and meaningful account.

This section, therefore, presents the findings and discussion under four categories: lexical, syntactic, stylistic variations, and best practices. The findings are presented using 16 extracts, which are coded A, B, and C as explained in the data analysis section.

- (i) Lexical variations

Extract 1

3A	3B	3C
ETABLISSEMENT: UNIVERSITE DE X	ESTABLISHMENT: UNIVERSITY OF X	INSTITUTION: UNIVERSITY OF X

Both translators and administrators acknowledged that although ‘establishment’ can be interpreted as an institution of higher learning, it is not used in Ugandan educational nomenclature. Translators explained that ‘establishment’, a direct lexical equivalent of the French *‘établissement’*, lacks cultural and functional equivalence, as universities and tertiary entities in Uganda are referred to as ‘institutions’. Thus, ‘Establishment’, in 3B, is not an accurate or Skopos-aligned translation for the target audience.

Extract 2

1A	1B	1C
CONSEIL NATIONAL DES EXAMENS B.P. 3817-KIGALI	NATIONAL EXAMINATIONS COUNCIL B.P. 3817 – KIGALI	NATIONAL EXAMINATIONS COUNCIL P.O.BOX 3817 – KIGALI

The Ugandan retranslation (1C) indicates a divergence in the rendering of the institutional postal address. Administrator participants A1 and A2 considered that using ‘P.O.Box’ was a better translation because they did not understand the meaning of the French abbreviation *‘B.P.’*. Translators T1 and T2 said that *‘B.P.’* did not significantly change the meaning and would not mind leaving it untranslated. However, the consensus view during the FGD was that ‘P.O.Box’ was the best compromise to avoid any misinterpretations by non-francophone readers.

Similarly, variations were observed in the translation of academic document titles:

Extract 3

1A	1B	1C
ATTESTATION DE REUSSITE AUX EXAMENS NATIONAUX DE FIN D’ETUDES SECONDAIRES DE NIVEAU A2	THE TESTIMONIAL OF SUCCESS IN FINAL NATIONAL EXAMINATIONS OF SECONDARY EDUCATION ‘A’ LEVEL	‘A2’ LEVEL EXAMINATIONS PASS SLIP/ADVANCED LEVEL RESULT SLIP

T1, T2, and T3 found the 1B translation too literal and, although lexically equivalent, not functionally equivalent, because it did not adequately express or accurately represent the level of education in Uganda.

First, the qualification in Rwanda is ‘A2’, yet it was translated as ‘A’ level. According to A6, *‘this is incorrect because the A2 level in Rwanda does not correspond to ‘A’ Level but ‘O’ Level in Uganda’*. This implies that even the second Ugandan retranslation, ‘Advanced Level Result Slip,’ was inaccurate in terms of education equivalence systems (A6), highlighting the importance of collaboration between translators and end-users and supporting Skopos theory’s emphasis on translational function.

Secondly, ‘testimonials’ are not awarded to secondary school candidates by the National Examinations Body in Uganda; instead, ‘pass slips’ are awarded. According to A1, A2, A4, A5, T1, T2, and T4, in Uganda, the term ‘testimonial’ is used at the tertiary level to certify students’ academic performance before graduation.

Finally, ‘testimonial of success’ is a direct translation from French and is tautological, since an academic testimonial in English implies success. We concur with Akpaca (2020) that “translating from the source language(French) into English is both a linguistic and, particularly, a cultural transaction” and “needs to adopt a functional approach by taking into account the realities of the target language and culture” (p. 124).

Extract 4

2A	2B	2C
FICHE DES RESULTATS OBTENUS AUX EXAMENS NATIONAUX DE FIN D’ETUDES SECONDAIRES DE NIVEAU A2	THE RESULT SLIP FOR END OF SECONDARY EDUCATION ADVANCED LEVEL A2	END OF A2 LEVEL EXAMINATIONS PASS SLIP/VOCATIONAL CERTIFICATE OF SECONDARY EDUCATION LEVEL A2

Translator T1 noted that the definite article ‘the’ should be omitted in 2B because it was tautological in English. However, A1 and all translators agreed that ‘result slip’ should be replaced with ‘pass slip’ because the Ugandan education system uses the latter term. A5 had no objection to the nomenclature ‘End of A2 Level Examinations Pass slip’ because at least it did not contain the expression ‘Advanced Level A2’, which, according to him, was the 2B translator’s ‘*own opinion*’ but not an accurate translation. However, he concurred with the nomenclature ‘Vocational Certificate of Secondary Education A2’. According to him, this accurately reflects the equivalent at the time, 2005, in the Ugandan and Rwandan education systems. This observation underscores the need to account for historical changes in education systems and documentation, as shifts in grading nomenclature can lead to significant differences between documents issued in 2005 and those issued in 2025. Keeping track of such changes is the responsibility of educational administrators working in collaboration with international counterparts.

Extract 5

4A	4B	4C
ATTESTATION DE REUSSITE	SUCCESS CERTIFICATE	BACHELOR’S DEGREE CERTIFICATE

After perusing the 4B translation, A1 noted: “*Here, we just say ‘Bachelor’s degree certificate’*”. A3 and A4 held the same view. Referring to ‘*date de délibération*’ in 4A which is translated as ‘*deliberation date*’ in 4B, A1 remarked: “*this is date of award*”. This was supported by A3 and A4.

Extract 6

5A	5B	5C
Attestation de Réussite au Diplôme de Licence	Bachelors Degree Success Testimonial	Bachelor’s Degree Certificate.
Il n’est délivré qu’un seul exemplaire d’attestation de réussite. Le titulaire peut établir et faire certifier des copies conformes.	Only one testimonial is issued. The owner can establish and certify sample copies.	Only one original degree certificate shall be issued. The holder may obtain certified copies as needed.

According to T1, T2, and T4, a testimonial would not function in this context in the TL system, as it is merely proof of having completed studies while awaiting the official degree certificate. A1 remarked: “*A testimonial is not yet final. It is temporary, and yet here the translation implies that it is a final document*”. A5 noted: “*A testimonial presents partial results, pending graduation.*” A4 clarified: “*A testimonial just indicates how far you’ve gone with the degree programme, e.g., first year, first semester, and Deans normally issue it. A degree certificate is the final document signed by the vice-chancellor and academic registrar, and bearing a university seal. The certificate is issued only once. Once you lose it, you can’t get a replacement. It has a finality about it. It is a permanent document with unforgeable security features, whereas testimonials are not final but temporary.*” According to the registrars’ expectations, a testimonial is first issued to show provisional results. After results are confirmed, a detailed transcript is issued, followed by the degree certificate or certificate of award, which serves as the final proof of programme completion. All translators and administrators noted that 5C was more consistent and precise than 5B and an appropriate translation of 5A.

Extract 7

6A	6B	6C
RELEVÉ DE NOTES CYCLE: LICENCE NIVEAU: 1 ANNEE 2018/2019	TRANSCRIPT DEGREE: BACHELOR’S LEVEL: 1 ACADEMIC YEAR: 2018/2019	ACADEMIC TRANSCRIPT DEGREE: BACHELOR’S YEAR: 1 ACADEMIC YEAR: 2018/2019

Administrators A1-A6 agreed that ‘Transcript’ was “*unclear*” and “*ambiguous*” as “*it can also mean an audio recording*”. ‘Academic Transcript’ was considered the accurate and institutionally appropriate term, providing a precise meaning that avoids confusion. Although ‘transcript’ can function as a shortened form, this cannot be reliably inferred across different cultural or communicative contexts, therefore the full term is preferred for readability and usability by administrators.

Translators and administrators unanimously agreed that Level 1 would not be clear to a Ugandan TL audience, although the meaning would be inferred indirectly after perusal of the entire document, which describes the years in terms of levels. The degree level could be misconstrued as undergraduate or postgraduate. In this context, ‘Year 1’ (6C) provides the culturally appropriate and Skopos-aligned equivalent.

There were disparities in lexical choices:

Extract 8

1A	1B	1C
Nous attestons par la présente que..... Mention: satisfaction Le directeur de l’école	This is to testify that..... Performance: Satisfaction The Headmaster	This is to hereby certify that... Grade: Satisfactory The Headteacher

Both 1B and 1C are similar in that the active sentence: "*Nous....*" is rendered by the passive, impersonal 'This is to ...', which is the norm for academic documents of this nature in Uganda. However, the divergence is lexical: 'testify' in 1B is rendered as 'certify' in 1C. According to the translators, the former is usually used in oral legal proceedings when witnesses provide evidence, but not in written academic documents, where an academic authority confirms a student's educational performance. A2, A3, and A4 supported this.

All translators agreed that the lexical choice of 'Grade: Satisfactory' (1C) complied with academic documents in Uganda. T2 explained that the noun 'Satisfaction' (1B) was vague and was best rendered by the adjective 'satisfactory' to describe the noun 'grade'. All administrators also concurred with the translation of 'satisfactory' grade, saying that 'satisfaction' was a direct translation from French.

According to A1, the term 'headmaster' was used in the past but has now been dropped in favour of 'headteacher' to avoid gender bias, just as 'chairman' has been replaced by 'chairperson' due to gender equity in language use. All translators agreed on using 'headteacher' instead of 'headmaster' or 'headmistress', saying that the latter two terms were outdated, while the former was inclusive and politically correct.

Extract 9

3A	3B	3C
Nom: A Prénom: B No. d'inscription: 12345CCC6789 Niveau d'étude: Première Année Domaine: Lettres et Langues Etrangères Filière: Langue Française Diplôme préparé: Licence	Last name: A First name: B Student No.: 12345CCC6789 Level of study: First Year Domain: Arts and foreign languages Field: French Language Prepared diploma: Bachelor's degree	Surname: A First name: B Registration No.: 12345CCC6789 Year of Study: Year 1 Branch of study: Arts and foreign languages Specialisation: French Language Programme: Bachelor's degree

All translators agreed that 'Last name' (3B) should be dropped in favour of 'Surname' (3C) because in the TL culture some individuals tend to have many names, including two or three given names and up to two family names. Depending on name order, an individual may have up to four names, with a given name appearing as a last name and a surname appearing as a second or third name. Thus, surnames are not necessarily last names, yet they remain essential markers of identity. Interestingly, A2, A3, and A5 noted that Makerere University's formatting of academic transcripts does not separate student names into 'surname' and 'first or given name' but instead lumps them together under a single entry: 'Name in full'.

Similarly, 'registration no. (3C) is preferred to 'student no.' (3B) Due to the TL system's institutional norms. According to A2, A3, A4, and A5, both terms are used at Makerere. While the student number serves as a financial identifier, enabling administrators to track tuition payments and monitor financial transactions in the system, the registration number is used for registration, admission, and examinations. It also includes a letter code that identifies the student's country. The Algerian source document (3A) includes a country identifier in the "*no.*

d'inscription" field, and it is therefore more accurately translated as 'registration number' in the Ugandan TL system.

'Level of study' (3B) is replaced by 'year of study' (3C) because, in the TL audience, it is ambiguous and could mean 'Diploma', 'Bachelor', 'Master', or 'Doctorate' levels. 'First year' (3B) is also replaced by 'Year 1' (3C). This is not a lexical mistranslation but an example of stylistic variation and differences in institutional norms, where the source institution names study years in words while the target-language institution prefers figures.

The translators in their FGD also agreed that 'Prepared diploma' must be replaced by 'Programme' because according to the context, this refers to the Bachelor's degree. Besides, it is contradictory and incongruous in the TL system to mention a diploma being pursued as a bachelor's degree, because these are two different study levels. All administrators held the same view.

These observations align with Nine and Selougha (2025), who show that Skopos theory prioritizes the target audience's needs and promotes effective communication by using strategies such as explication, addition, and substitution when literal translation is insufficient.

Extract 10

3A	3B	3C
Matières constitutives de l'unité d'enseignement	Constituent modules of the teaching unit	Teaching unit courses
Intitulé (s)		Course name
Techniques du travail universitaire	Title	Academic skills and methods
	Techniques of university work	

Translators in their FGD concurred with the 3C retranslation, finding it clear, coherent, and concise. They considered the 3B translation of the course name 'Techniques of university work' to be vague because it implied administrative competencies, yet, given the degree transcript's context, the course had nothing to do with university administrative work. They found the retranslation appropriate, given the student's level and the context of the other courses being studied this semester. A1, A3, A4, and A5 also echoed this view.

Extract 11

3A	3B	3C
Session Rattrapage Decision: Admis(e)	Remedial Session Decision: Successful	Retake Exam Session Exam Board Decision: Passed

The translators' FGD highlighted that while the source translation term 'remedial' is not inaccurate, it lacks cultural relevance and pragmatic equivalence. The term 'retake exam' is well understood in the Ugandan context. Administrator A5 reiterated that 'remedial' and 'retake' do not in fact mean the same thing. Whereas the former implied '*reinforcing skills to catch up and perform better before an exam*', the latter implied '*failing an exam and the need to redo the coursework and examinations*'. A1, A2, A3 and A4 also concurred with A5. A3 highlighted that "*a remedial can be given by a lecturer to a poorly performing student, and this is only done for assignments, but never for examinations. You cannot have a remedial examination session.*" It is noted that 'retake exam' is functionally equivalent in line with the Skopos theory.

Extract 12

5A	5B	5C
Vu le procès verbal des délibérations du jury en date du_____ -	Mindful of the official report of the deliberation of the jury dated_____	Considering the Examiners' Board Report dated_____

The translator FGD noted that although the term 'jury' exists in English to denote a group of citizens who determine the verdict in a court of law, this does not apply in Uganda, where there is no jury system, as judges determine trials. In the education system, the francophone term 'jury' is rendered as 'examiners' panel', but this only applies to a Master's or doctoral degree. In this context, even the 'panel' cannot function according to Skopos, and the accurate rendition is an examiner's board report, which is functional at the undergraduate level.

However, during the translators' FGD, there was a debate over whether to use 'Examiners Board Report' or 'Academic Board Report', with no clear consensus. Similarly, administrators were divided. While A2 and A3 concurred with the former, A1, A4, and A5 concurred with the latter, arguing that, much as the Examiners Board recommends that the student has passed examinations and should be considered for the degree award, it is the Academic Board that receives the report and makes the final decision, having considered all requirements and quality assurance mechanisms. Both make minutes or a report, but the Academic Board makes the final decision before a student can graduate. This functional difference in the educational system hierarchy is a sociocultural/administrative factor that can influence translation decisions.

Extract 13

5A	5B	5C
Atteste que: L A suivi avec succès la formation pour l'obtention du Diplôme de Licence.	Certifies that: L has successfully completed the coursework for award of the Bachelor's degree.	Hereby certifies that: L Successfully completed coursework and examinations for the award of the Bachelor's degree

All translators and administrators agreed that the 5C retranslation was accurate by reinforcing the word 'coursework' (5B) with 'examinations' because 'coursework' alone would imply that the student has not fully completed requirements for the award of a degree. In the Ugandan Higher Education system, coursework or continuous assessment accounts for 40% of the overall score, while written examinations account for 60%.

(ii) Syntactic variations

Extract 14

1A	1B	1C
Nous attestons par la présente que le (la) nommé (e) <u>XY</u> enregistré (e) sous le numéro <u>123</u> dans l'option <u>MATH-PHYSIQUE</u> de l'école <u>A</u> a subi les examens nationaux de fin d'études secondaires de l'année 1999/2000 et qu'il (elle) a obtenu les grades reprise n regard des examens ci-dessous:	This is to testify that <u>XY</u> registration number <u>123</u> in the option <u>MATH-PHYSIQUE</u> of the School A sat for the final secondary education examinations of 1999/2000 and obtained the following grades in the respective subjects below.	This is to certify that <u>XY</u> , registration number: <u>123</u> option: <u>MATH-PHYSICS</u> School: A sat for the final national end of secondary school examinations, 1999/2000 session, and obtained the following results:

All translators and administrators found 1C concise, presenting student details in a shorter style and avoiding long, winding sentences. They also noted that 'physics' appropriately replaces

‘physique’. Redundancies like ‘obtained the following grades in the respective subjects below’ are also omitted in consonance with the TL administrative style for this type of document.

Some were also a mix of lexical, syntactic, and stylistic features:

Extract 15

4A	4B	4C
Je soussigné le doyen de la faculté des Lettres et des langues de l’université D, Certifie que l’étudiant (e):	I hereby, Dean of the faculty of Arts and Languages, at D university, certify that the student:	I, the undersigned Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Languages, at D university, hereby certify that the student:

All translators and administrators found the 4B phrase grammatically awkward. A1, A3, and A5 explained that in such administrative documents, the person speaking is typically specified (I, ...) before introducing their position (Dean ...) and the certification (hereby certify). T1, T2, and T3 observed that 4B was a direct translation of French syntax, in which commas separate phrases. The 4B expression is a calque, whereas the 4C expression is a functional adaptation in line with the Skopos theory.

Extract 16

4A	4B	4C
Nom: F Prénom: G Né(e) le: 01/01/1990 à H Matricule: 11111JKL0000 A été déclaré(e) admis(e) pour l’obtention du diplôme de licence LMD. Date des délibérations: 01/02/2020 Session: Normale Promotion: 2019/2020	Last name: F First name: G Born on: 01/01/1990 in H Student No.: 11111JKL0000 Has been declared successful for obtaining the Bachelor’s degree (LMD) Deliberation date: 01/02/2020 Session: Ordinary Promotion: 2019/2020	Name in full: F G Date of birth: 01/01/1990 Place of birth: H Registration No.: 11111JKL0000 Passed examinations for the award of the Bachelor of Arts degree in French language Date of Examinations Board Report: 01/02/2020 Session: Ordinary Academic Year of completion: 2019/2020

The retranslation in 4C combines lexical, syntactic, and stylistic variations from the 4B translation. Instead of a literal translation of ‘nom’ (surname) and ‘prénom’ (first name) in the original 4A, 4C uses ‘name in full’, which, according to T2, T4, A1, A2, and A4, is the conventional usage in Ugandan administrative documents of this nature (degree certificate). Nonetheless, as observed in 3C, ‘surname’ is also used in this type of document. This also applies to ‘date of birth’ and ‘place of birth’ (4C) instead of ‘born on’ and ‘in’ (4B). All translators and administrators agreed that ‘promotion’ in 4B was incomprehensible and that ‘year of completion’ in 4C was an adequate rendering.

A1 and A2 recommended ‘date of award’ instead of ‘date of examination board report’ (4C). Another notable difference is the omission of *LMD* (Licence–Master–Doctorat) in the 4C retranslation. *LMD* refers to the francophone higher education structure equivalent to the Bachelor’s, Master’s, and Doctoral degrees. All translators and administrators agreed that its inclusion in the English version would be redundant and tautological.

(i) Stylistic variations

Participants did not comment on any stylistic differences (formatting, capitalization, italics, and general layout). According to them, there was nothing significant because, even though some francophone documents seemed heavily skewed towards capitalization or italics,

these did not impede meaning. It was a minor factor overlooked by both translators and administrators, who focused predominantly on the terms' lexical meanings. The lack of data could also be explained by the small number of documents (18) that focused on only one category (educational documents). A bigger corpus from more countries and various categories would have yielded more data on this aspect.

(ii) Best practices

A6 noted the need for translators to engage with educational administrators because the former sometimes make literal translation errors due to misunderstandings of educational systems, grading systems, and nomenclature. For instance, he mentioned the example of the DRC 'Diplôme d'État', which was usually translated as the 'National 'A' Level Certificate' by CLCS translators. According to him, this was problematic because on presentation of the 'A' Level Certificate, it is presupposed that the same student also has an 'O' Level Certificate, since the two are supposed to be produced to educational administrators to process students' admission to HEIs. Incidentally, the DRC system does not have an 'O' Level, and upon failure to present the 'O' Level certificate, the student's 'A' Level Certificate translation is rejected. A6 therefore recommended that CLCS translators should translate such a certificate as 'National Certificate of End of Secondary Education' because it is not pragmatically similar to the 'A' Level certificate in the Commonwealth Education System. He also recommended more training for translators on the similarities and differences between francophone and anglophone education systems to facilitate understanding and "*ease access to education opportunities*".

Translator T1 during the FGD reiterated the importance of translators doing background checks regarding the education system nomenclature, for instance, differences between 'testimonial', registration number', 'index number', 'option', 'combination'. Although she did not mention end-users, this recommendation aligns with collaborating with administrator end-users to work harmoniously in the process of producing and using a translation to access an educational opportunity.

Limitations of the Study

The study included six administrators and five translators. A broader scope of translators and administrators from other agencies would yield more conclusive results about the translation and retranslation of academic documents from French to English in Uganda.

The study excluded key stakeholders, such as students, whose perspectives could have offered more profound insights into the usability of their academic document translation or retranslation and its impact on their educational or employment pursuits.

We acknowledge these limitations, which prevent findings from being fully generalizable for the whole country. Nonetheless, these findings warrant further investigation.

Conclusion

The study set out to identify lexical, syntactic, and stylistic features in the translations and retranslations of academic documents; sociocultural and administrative factors that influence translation decisions; and best practices for academic document translation in cross-border contexts.

It was noted that lexical variations were predominant in the translations and retranslations of academic documents from French to English. These included academic certificate nomenclature, academic grade descriptions, student registration details, course names, examination sessions, and academic awarding entities. Syntactic variances were minimal and included certification of academic results. The participants identified no stylistic divergences. The Ugandan educational system and naming conventions influenced translation decisions. Best practices for academic document translation include increased collaboration between translators and educational administrators to understand better the purpose of academic translations, the education system, and educational administrators' expectations, thereby facilitating access to

educational and employment opportunities in Uganda for individuals who have studied in francophone countries.

Furthermore, the francophone source-country translations tended to be literal, without taking into account target-country institutional norms, which target-country translators can best understand. While analyzing the academic certificate translations of Chinese students seeking admission to Spanish universities, Andújar and Vargas-Urpí (2022) note the poor quality of these translations, both in content and in formal aspects. Such cross-border translations are best handled by local translators who understand the target country's education system. The Ugandan retranslations are target-oriented and align with Skopos theory to produce functional translations that meet the expectations of educational administrators who make decisions about student academic documents. Skopos is employed to show how the meanings of these texts are conveyed from French to English while preserving their functions and purposes, producing the same impact on the administrator end-user. Overall, this theory provides a meaningful framework for understanding this cross-border translation, underscoring the need for further research into its relevance and implications.

About the Author

Enoch Sebuyungu is a Senior Lecturer at the Makerere University School of Languages. He is also a translator and interpreter (French to English). He holds a PhD in Linguistics from the Université de Poitiers, France. His research interests include Foreign Language Learning and Translation Studies. As Coordinator of the Makerere University Centre for Language and Communication Services from 2011 to 2018, he managed community outreach services in language learning, translation, and interpreting for national and international end-users. In 2016, he was awarded a Cambridge Africa Partnership for Research Excellence (CAPREx) post-doctoral fellowship to undertake a Translator Training Project. His website is <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6953-0515>

AI Statement

This document has been enhanced through the use of Grammarly and ChatGPT which were employed to refine its linguistic style and correct grammar and spelling. While the incorporation of these technologies may introduce some AI-generated linguistic patterns, it is important to note that the core intellectual content, data interpretation, and conclusions presented are entirely the work of the author.

Statement of Absence of Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest related to the research, findings, or recommendations presented in this paper. All conclusions drawn are independent and unbiased.

References

- Akpaca, S. M. (2020). Explanatory Notes on the Problems of Equivalence in the Translation of Academic Certificates and Diplomas. *International Journal of Linguistics, Literature and Translation*, 3(11), 124 - 132. <https://doi.org/10.32996/ijlt.2020.3.11.12>
- Andújar G., & Vargas-Urpí, M. (2022). “It is hereby certified!”: A contrastive analysis of a Chinese-Spanish corpus of notarized translations [“Por el presente se certifica!” Análisis contrastive de un corpus chino-español de traducciones notarizadas]. *Revista Española de Linguística Aplicada*, 35(2), 395-424.
- Bandia, P. (2005). Esquisse d’une histoire de la traduction en Afrique. *Meta: Translators’ Journal*, 50(3), 957 - 971.
- Denscombe, M. (2010), *The Good Research Guide for small-scale social research projects- Fourth Edition*. McGraw-Hill: Open University Press.

- Dobakhti, L. (2013). Commenting on Findings in Qualitative and Quantitative Research Articles' Discussion Sections in Applied Linguistics. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics & English Literature*, 2(5), 145–154. doi:10.7575/aiac.ijalel.v.2n.5p.145
- Lambert-Tierrafria, S. (2007). Templating as a Strategy for Translating Official Documents from Spanish to English. *Meta: Translators' Journal*, 52(2), 215 - 238.
- Mayoral, A.R. (2003), *Translating Official Documents*. Manchester, UK and Northampton, MA: St Jerome Publishing.
- Nedainova, I. (2021). Skopos theory in the light of functional translation. *Alfred Nobel University Journal of Philology*, 2(22), 251 - 257. <https://doi.org/10.32342/2523-4463-2021-2-22-24>
- Nine, H., & Selougha, F. (2025). A Functional Approach to Medical Translation: A Skopos theory-based Study. *Journal of Languages and Translation*, 5(1), 296–309.
- Relinque, M. & Lobato, J. (2025). Categorización de problemas de traducción en certificaciones académicas universitarias de los Estados Unidos: Importancia de las categorías transversales. *Lebende Sprachen*, 70(2), DOI: [10.1515/les-2024-0033](https://doi.org/10.1515/les-2024-0033)
- Sebuyungo, E. (2021). Translating official documents from French to English in Uganda. A sociolinguistic and pragmatic approach. *Babel International Journal of Translation*, 67(6), 730 - 757. <https://doi.org/10.1075/babel.00243.Seb>