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Bridging Policy and Practice: The Mediating Role of China's Crisis Translation Scholarship in the 2020 Public Health Response

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ABSTRACT

To address the persistent gap between policy design and on-the-ground implementation across diverse linguistic and cultural settings, this paper proposes the Policy–Scholarship–Practice (PSP) continuum as an integrated methodological framework. The continuum foregrounds scholarship as the key mediating force that enables dynamic interaction among policy formulation, academic inquiry, and practical execution. Using China's crisis translation responses during the 2020 public health emergency as a case study, the paper analyzes the mechanisms through which these interactions unfold. The findings show that policy initiatives significantly stimulated the development of Emergency Language Services (ELS) research—mirroring trends in global Crisis Translation studies—and that this scholarly expansion subsequently contributed to more targeted and operational policy interventions at both national and local levels. Scholars have also played an active translational role by coordinating, organizing, and participating in multi-level crisis translation projects and talent training programs, thereby enhancing the country's linguistic preparedness for emergencies. However, the feedback loop from practice back to scholarship remains underdeveloped, constrained by entrenched paradigms and utilitarian incentives. The evolution of crisis translation in China thus demonstrates both the value of cross-stakeholder collaboration and the indispensable role of scholarship in bridging the policy–practice divide, highlighting how academic insights can materially shape the implementation and effectiveness of crisis translation interventions.

Keywords: Crisis Translation; Emergency Language Service; Emergency Translation; Policy-Practice Gap; China; Public Health Emergency

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1. Introduction

Although researchers have documented the persistent marginalization of translation within risk-management and reduction policies^[1–5], evidence from diverse emergency contexts—such as public health crises, conflicts, migration, and human trafficking—demonstrates its critical and often indispensable function^[6–8]. Yet, prevailing discourse in crisis translation frequently treats policy and practice as largely separate domains with minimal interaction, revealing a persistent gap between theoretical frameworks and practical implementation. To address this gap, the present study proposes a methodological framework that illuminates the dynamic relationships between policy and practice, with scholarship serving as a mediating conduit. Grounded in rigorous scientific methods and supported by empirical evidence from China’s crisis translation initiatives during the 2020 public health emergency, this framework delineates the complex processes and mechanisms underpinning interactions among policy, scholarship, and practice. Through systematic analysis, the study demonstrates how these elements interweave to strengthen China’s crisis translation capacity, thereby bridging the divide between policy design and operational execution.

2. Literature Review and Methodological Framework

2.1. The Dichotomy of Policy and Practice in Crisis Translation Studies

Situated at the periphery of disaster studies and crisis communication, crisis translation has increasingly gained scholarly traction. Reviewing recent developments in the field, O’Brien^[9] identifies three major areas of focus: emergency response policies, translation technologies, and the education and ethics of citizen translators. The latter two domains, in particular, converge on the practical modalities through which crisis translation is operationalized.

Emergency management policy—widely recognised as “an intricate terrain”—constitutes a complex yet essential domain of inquiry^[10] (p. 5). Despite its centrality to government strategy, linguistic considerations are rarely foregrounded in national policy frameworks, and explicit references to translation remain even more scarce^[5, 11, 12].

O’Brien et al. lament that such omissions reflect a broader, global pattern of neglect^[13]. Paradoxically, translation plays a critical operational role in crisis response, risk reduction, and preparedness^[9, 10, 14]. This disjunction between policy silence and practical indispensability has prompted a growing body of practice-oriented research. These studies highlight the pressing need for the education and training of crisis translators and interpreters—many of whom are non-professional bilingual volunteers with minimal experience^[15–18]. Scholarly work has examined a range of issues, including the organisation and training of crisis translation personnel^[19–21], the specific needs and challenges they encounter in the field^[3, 6, 22], the specialized competencies required for crisis settings^[23, 24], and the ethical considerations underpinning their responsibilities^[17, 25, 26]. In parallel, technology has emerged as a major axis of inquiry within efforts to enhance emergency response^[27, 28]. Research has explored innovations such as automated information retrieval systems^[29, 30], social media-based platforms^[31], statistical machine translation tools^[32], and multilingual disaster information system^[33], all designed to expand access to crucial multilingual information to non-native speakers. Additionally, crowdsourcing approaches^[34, 35] and models such as Co-TEM^[36] have been advanced as effective collaborative methodologies for engaging with culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities during crises.

Yet, as O’Brien unequivocally observes, “policy does not, however, guarantee implementation”^[9] (p. 94)—a point echoed by Piller et al., who call for renewed and sustained dialogue between policymakers and activists in order to realign policy intentions with lived realities^[11] (p. 512). Although the structural gap between policy formulation and practical execution is widely recognised^[14], no robust mechanisms currently exist to translate policy commitments into operational outcomes. This persistent disjunction not only exposes the limitations of top-down governance but also underscores a broader epistemic problem: policies often presume implementation capacities that have neither been theorised nor institutionally secured. Within this unresolved landscape, the need for a systematic framework capable of mediating between policy and practice becomes particularly pressing—highlighting the very conceptual space that this study seeks to address.

2.2. A Framework for Bridging the Dichotomy: The PSP Continuum

To address this longstanding oversight, this study proposes a methodological framework—the Policy-Scholarship-Practice (PSP) continuum (see **Figure 1**)—developed through sustained participation in, and critical reflection on, crisis translation responses during the 2020 public health emergency. The framework aims to illuminate the structural and procedural complexities that produce divergences between policy intent and practical implementation. By articulating the mediating functions of scholarship, it seeks to advance theoretical and applied discussions on how the gap between policy formulation and operational practice can be systematically narrowed, thereby enhancing the overall effectiveness of emergency management systems.

Before introducing the PSP continuum, it is neces-

sary to clarify the notion of “scholarship”, a term pivotal to the present analysis. Carter^[37] situates scholarship under the broad umbrella of “research”, which encompasses various activities such as theorization, empirical observation, and systematic documentation. Neumann^[38], however, offers a more nuanced—at times internally tensioned—interpretation. He alternately describes scholarship as “a good, all-encompassing description of academic enquiry” and “a far broader activity than research”, while simultaneously acknowledging the interconnected yet distinct nature of the two domains^[38] (pp. 103–108). In this study, we adopt an integrative and inclusive understanding of scholarship: one that extends beyond the production of new knowledge to encompass the reflective, interpretive, and critical practices that inform, shape, and sustain academic inquiry. This expanded conception enables a more robust account of scholarship’s mediating role within the PSP continuum.

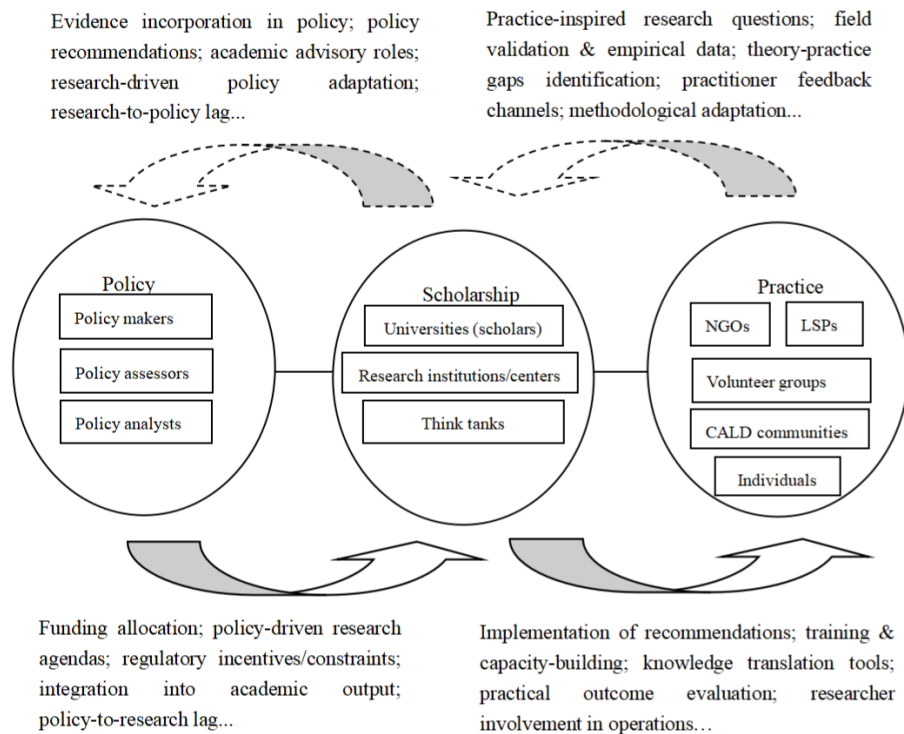


Figure 1. Policy-Scholarship-Practice Continuum.

As illustrated in **Figure 1**, scholarship functions as the central mediating force within the PSP continuum, though its influence unfolds in an inherently asymmetrical manner. Forward-moving dynamics—flowing from policy to scholarship and from scholarship to practice—tend to follow stronger and more institutionally structured pathways (solid

lines). By contrast, reverse flows are typically weaker, more episodic, and less formally institutionalized (dashed lines). In crisis contexts, however, these ordinarily attenuated reverse dynamics can become unexpectedly amplified: accelerated feedback cycles, heightened operational pressures, and the rapid emergence of new knowledge gaps may collectively

intensify practice-to-scholarship and scholarship-to-policy influences, thereby recalibrating the directional balance of the continuum. The capacity of scholarly communities to mediate and narrow the policy–practice gap has been widely recognized across sectors, particularly in education. Southgate et al. highlight the transformative power of scientific discovery in shaping policy and informing practical action^[39] (p. 7), reaffirming scholarship’s pivotal role at the interface of policy design and operational practice. Similarly, Cohen and Ball conceptualize the relationship between policy and practice as intrinsically reciprocal and co-constitutive, rather than unidirectional^[40] (p. 238). Building upon this discourse, Schögler emphasizes the importance of sustained reciprocal engagement between local policymakers and academic experts, advocating for a symbiotic exchange of political insights and scholarly expertise^[41] (p. 116).

However, despite the valuable insights these studies offer into the relationships among policy, scholarship, and practice, they remain limited in explicating the underlying processes and mechanisms through which these interactions unfold. Much of the existing literature treats these linkages as self-evident or linear, thereby overlooking the contingent, negotiated, and often uneven nature of their interplay. This gap underscores the need for a more integrative and analytically robust framework—one capable of synthesizing disparate perspectives while also interrogating the dynamic forces that condition their mutual influence. The framework proposed in this study seeks to address this conceptual lacuna by offering a structured methodology that renders visible the foundational mechanisms animating the ongoing exchanges between policy, scholarship, and practice. It advances a model grounded in dynamic reciprocity, positioning scholarship as the critical mediating force that both interprets policy and informs practice, while also being reshaped by feedback emerging from practical contexts. In what follows, we outline three defining attributes of these interactions, demonstrating how scholarship functions not merely as a conduit but as an active catalyst that reconfigures the policy–practice relationship.

- **Predictability and Unpredictability:** Investigating the dynamics of the PSP continuum reveals an interactional terrain marked by shifting degrees of predictability and unpredictability. These fluctuations underscore the inherent difficulty of anticipating the causal pathways

through which policy formulation, scholarly inquiry, and practical implementation influence one another. Scholarly interventions may yield narrowly targeted, anticipated policy adjustments, yet they may also provoke broader, unanticipated transformations across institutional or policy domains. In crisis translation contexts, however, the situational specificity and temporal urgency of emergency needs serve to sharpen these otherwise diffuse relationships. Crises impose clearly delineated demands that render the reciprocal influences between scholarship, policy measures, and frontline practices more visible and analytically traceable. This heightened clarity enables a more precise examination of how academic work shapes concrete policy actions and operational strategies—and, conversely, how emergent practical needs recalibrate scholarly agendas. In this sense, crises function as methodological windows, exposing the latent mechanics of the PSP continuum that often remain obscured in routine governance settings.

- **Immediacy and Latency:** A more granular interrogation of the PSP continuum reveals a temporal spectrum spanning immediacy and latency, a dimension concerned with when scholarly influence becomes legible within policy and practice. While certain forms of academic input precipitate rapid and highly responsive shifts, others diffuse more slowly, accruing impact incrementally over extended periods. Yet, within crisis translation contexts, this temporal distribution is structurally skewed toward immediacy. The operational logic of emergencies—marked by acute time compression, sharply prioritized imperatives, and tightly delineated task structures—significantly narrows the interval between scholarly intervention and institutional uptake. This contraction not only renders the movement of knowledge more empirically traceable but also intensifies the visibility of academic influence, offering a unique analytical vantage point for examining the accelerated dynamics of knowledge translation under crisis conditions.
- **Flexibility and Rigidity:** Complementing this temporal dimension is a structural spectrum characterized by varying degrees of institutional flexibility and rigidity. This dimension concerns the extent to which organizational and procedural configurations facilitate—or

constrain—the uptake of scholarly insights. Flexible mechanisms, such as adaptive policy guidelines, agile organizational architectures, and context-responsive translation protocols, create channels for the rapid incorporation of academic knowledge and enable practices to recalibrate swiftly in response to emergent demands. By contrast, rigid arrangements—embedded in bureaucratic routines, standardized policy templates, or deeply institutionalized operational norms—can impede or delay the implementation of scholarly recommendations and may at times produce unintended or counterproductive effects. Within crisis translation settings, the dynamic interplay between flexible and rigid components decisively shapes both the orientation and the efficacy of interactions across the continuum. Flexibility enhances responsiveness and situational acuity, whereas rigidity contributes to standardization, procedural consistency, and regulatory compliance—often at the expense of adaptability. Attending to this structural duality reveals the contingent, context-dependent pathways through which scholarly knowledge moves from policy formulation to on-the-ground practice.

Jamaludin^[42] (p. 14) aptly characterizes the transition from research to policy and, ultimately, to practice as inherently complex and time-intensive. The crucial mediating role of scholarship in addressing the “unintended gap”^[43] (p. 640) between policy and practice remains insufficiently acknowledged. Such recognition, when it occurs, should extend beyond rhetorical acknowledgement, necessitating a rigorous and systematic methodological approach. Echoing this imperative, Leeuw et al.^[44] (p. 17) argue that mere production of research evidence, without structured mechanisms for integration, is insufficient; effective utilization requires sustained and substantive collaboration across the domains of research, policy, and practice. This perspective underscores that recognizing the significance of scholarship constitutes only a preliminary step; actionable commitments are essential to translate academic insights into policy reforms and practical applications effectively. Grounded in both theoretical reflection and empirical observation, the PSP continuum emerges as a pragmatic framework for elucidating the operational dynamics of these complex interactions. The following section demonstrates its functionality and rationale within the domain of crisis translation through an in-depth

case study.

3. Case Study: China’s ELS During the 2020 Public Health Emergency

The rapid escalation of the 2020 public health emergency demanded the immediate deployment of strategies to convey critical information across diverse linguistic and cultural contexts, underscoring the essential role of crisis translation in emergency management. This case study examines the dynamic interplay among policy formulation, scholarly inquiry, and practical implementation, highlighting scholarship as a pivotal mediator in fostering synergies. In doing so, it illustrates how targeted academic engagement can reinforce these connections, thereby enhancing China’s crisis translation capacities and operational responsiveness.

To systematically examine the dynamic interactions among policy, scholarship, and practice, this study adopts a qualitative case study approach, ideally suited to capturing the context-specific and multifaceted nature of Emergency Language Services (ELS) during China’s 2020 public health crisis. Evidence was purposively drawn from a range of sources—including official policy documents, government reports, media coverage, and pertinent scholarly literature—emphasizing materials that capture real-time decision-making, implementation processes, and iterative feedback loops between academic inquiry and practical application.

The Policy-Scholarship-Practice (PSP) framework informed both data collection and analysis. To operationalize the framework within the ELS context, specific, observable indicators were delineated for each dimension of interaction: (1) Policy→Scholarship: allocation of research funding, policy-driven research agendas, scholarly outputs addressing policy-identified ELS priorities; (2) Scholarship→Policy: policy consultations, formal recommendations, measurable policy adaptations reflecting scholarly input; (3) Scholarship→Practice: number of translator trainings, deployment of multilingual resources, uptake of scholarly recommendations in field operations; and (4) Practice→Scholarship: mechanisms for capturing field feedback, case documentation, and problem identification informing research agendas. Data were systematically coded along these dimensions and analyzed through thematic synthesis, triangulating multiple

sources to ensure interpretive rigor and contextual depth. This approach facilitates a nuanced understanding of how scholarship mediates policy–practice interactions and the reciprocal flows from practice to scholarship and from scholarship to policy.

By explicitly aligning observable indicators with each PSP dimension, the case study moves beyond conceptual abstraction, demonstrating the framework’s operational relevance for both research and policy design. It yields actionable insights for the strategic integration of Emergency Language Services within national and local governance, elucidating mechanisms that enhance adaptability, responsiveness, and resilience in crisis contexts.

3.1. Policy-to-Scholarship: ELS As Crisis Translation’s Alias in China

The significance of language in emergency contexts began to attract intermittent political attention in China

roughly a decade ago. As in many countries, policies pertaining to language development and emergency management frequently overlook translation, often presenting repetitive and formulaic directives (see **Table 1**, column 3). Distinctively, China articulates crisis translation through the domestically coined concept of Emergency Language Services (ELS), reflecting a context-specific understanding and application of translation in emergencies and underscoring a deliberate effort to cultivate a domestic scholarly discourse on the topic.

Policy directives are often articulated in vague and non-explicit terms^[45, 46], a linguistic ambiguity that permits a wide range of interpretations and opens a space for scholarly engagement across multiple disciplines. In response, linguists—particularly those specializing in translation and language policy—have spearheaded the development of Emergency Language Services (ELS) research, aligning academic inquiry with the policy impetus to integrate language services into emergency management.

Table 1. Policy Documents Containing Emergency Language Services.

Year	Name of the Documents	Emergency-Related Linguistic Content
2012	<i>Guidelines of the National Medium and Long-term Reform and Development of Language and Characters (2012–2020)</i>	Develop a comprehensive mechanism for national ELSs; Formulate language policies tailored for international affairs and emergencies; Promote the creation of a specialized pool of ELS experts.
2016	<i>Guidelines of the Thirteenth Five-year Plan for the Development of the National Language and Characters</i>	Create and maintain a recruitment and reserve system for specialized ELS professionals; Offer comprehensive language services for major international events and disaster relief operations; Enhance the capabilities and efficiency of language emergency response and assistance services.
2017	<i>Civil Procedure Law of the People’s Republic of China</i>	Ensure translation services are available for litigants upon request, with the cost to be borne by the requesting party.
2020	<i>Guidelines of Comprehensively Strengthening Language and Characters in the New Era</i>	Strengthen the national ELS infrastructure; Ensure language services are accessible to individuals with disabilities and foreign nationals; Advocate for the formation of national volunteer teams dedicated to providing language services.
2020	<i>The Spirit of the Fourth Plenary Session of the 19th CPC Central Committee</i>	Enhance and modernize the national emergency management system; Bolster capabilities in risk prevention and reduction.
2021	<i>Notice of the Fourteenth Five-year Plan for National Emergency System</i>	Enhance the multilingual proficiency of emergency rescue teams; Form a dedicated team specifically tasked with providing ELSs.

Over the past four to five years, approximately two hundred scholarly publications have emerged on Emergency Language Services (ELS), encompassing diverse topics such as ELS ontology^[47, 48], talent development^[49, 50], critical

evaluations of ELS practices^[51], and the creation of ELS resources^[52]. The establishment of dedicated ELS sections within prestigious journals—such as the *Chinese Journal of Language Policy and Planning* and the *Journal of Tian-*

jin Foreign Studies University—signals a robust academic endorsement of policies prioritizing crisis translation. This convergence of political recognition and scholarly support has significantly propelled the advancement of ELS research, underscoring the reciprocal interplay between policy imperatives and academic inquiry. Substantial research funding from national, provincial, and municipal Offices for Philosophy and Social Sciences, alongside institutional backing from the Ministry of Education and the Secretariat for National ELS Corps Preparation Work, has further catalyzed this scholarly momentum. A notable milestone was the online demonstration meeting on August 15, 2020, which showcased the inaugural cohort of ELS research initiatives. These projects span a broad spectrum, from evaluations of ELS product efficacy and regional and sectoral needs assessments to strategies for developing a national ELS corps, comprehensive reviews of international ELS theories and practices, and investigations into China's ELS educational framework^[53].

Policymakers, in conjunction with scholars from universities and research institutions, have actively engaged in collaborative initiatives designed to advance ELS research^[53]. This policy-driven impetus has precipitated a marked increase in scholarly output—including journal articles, research projects, reports, monographs, conferences, research centers, and lecture series dedicated to ELS—between 2020 and 2023. Such intensified academic activity has been instrumental in consolidating ELS as “an established academic field”^[54] (p.32), reflecting the synergistic impact of coordinated policy support and scholarly engagement.

3.2. Scholarship-to-Policy: ELS Embedded in National Policies

Substantial, well-established scientific research exerts a pivotal influence on policymaking^[55] (p.473). This effect is particularly pronounced in China, where the scholarly community's extensive expertise actively informs policy adjustments, owing in large part to the multifaceted roles assumed by leading linguistic scholars. Figures such as Li Yuming, former Director of the Department of Language Information Management, and Qu Shaobing, former Secretary of the Party Committee at Guangzhou University, exemplify this dynamic. Their dual engagement in academic and political spheres enables them to channel scientific insights directly into the policymaking process, thereby establishing an effec-

tive conduit for shaping and refining language-related policy initiatives.

The translation of scientific insights into actionable policies is exemplified by developments during the Fourth Session of the 13th National People's Congress of China in March 2021. In response to proposals No. 8680 and No. 4236—submitted by Deputies Zhou Shuying and Luo Xia, respectively—aimed at enhancing language service capabilities in severe emergencies, the Ministry of Emergency Management, in coordination with the Ministry of Education and the National Health Commission, formally integrated the development of Emergency Language Services (ELS) into the national language policy agenda^[56]. The subsequent establishment of the National Language Service Corps of China (NLSCC) further illustrates how scholarly advocacy can catalyze policy transformation. Propelled by contributions from leading academics^[57–59] and proposals from 29 premier institutions, the inclusion of the NLSCC in the Fourteenth Five-Year Plan for the National Emergency System underscores the tangible impact of academia on policy formation. Following its inauguration on April 28, 2022, the NLSCC's operational framework was rapidly implemented through the *Three-Year Plan for the NLSCC (2023–2025)*, a joint initiative of the Ministry of Education and the State Language Commission. Collectively, these cases exemplify a model in which academic insights substantively shape and enhance the policy landscape, particularly with regard to language services in emergency contexts.

Van den Hove contends that science can propel issues onto the political agenda merely by “discovering a phenomenon”^[60] (p. 811), highlighting the complex and non-linear interplay between scholarship and policy-making. This dynamic encompasses a network of interrelations whereby a single scientific insight may not only draw attention to previously unrecognized issues but also precipitate a cascade of unanticipated policy adjustments and subsequent actions. Revisiting the aforementioned proposals demonstrates this effect: policymakers, guided by scholarly evidence, frequently extend measures well beyond the original recommendations. For instance, in response to proposal No. 8680, which advocated the establishment of a talent database, the Ministry of Education implemented broader and more concrete measures, including the launch of a multilingual service center at Beijing Foreign Studies University and the formulation

of guidelines for an ELS talent cultivation base at Tianjin Foreign Studies University^[56]. Similarly, the establishment of the National Language Service Corps of China (NLSCC) generated a ripple effect, fostering the creation of supplementary ELS volunteer groups at provincial, regional, and university levels. Collectively, these developments accelerated the formation of related initiatives, strategic plans, and legislative actions, underscoring the profound influence of scholarly contributions on policy formation.

While these cases underscore the substantial influence of scientific insights on policy formation, they simultaneously expose challenges in translating centralized directives into flexible local implementation. Drawing on the PSP continuum, a notable tension emerges: robust top-down policy flows—though facilitating rapid national coordination—can inadvertently generate rigidity at the local level, particularly when provincial or municipal bodies confront resource limitations or constrained interpretive latitude. To reconcile national strategic coherence with local adaptability, future ELS policies could integrate “adaptive clauses,” enabling subnational authorities to tailor implementation strategies in accordance with available linguistic resources, demographic contexts, and emergency risk profiles. Complementary mechanisms, including pilot programs, phased rollouts, and localized experimentation, may further enhance responsiveness without undermining overarching objectives. By embedding such adaptive features, policies would not only operationalize the dynamic reciprocity central to the PSP continuum but also ensure that scholarly insights are translated into context-sensitive practices, thereby bolstering the resilience and efficacy of China’s emergency language governance system.

3.3. Scholarship-to-Practice: National ELS Initiatives

Despite increasing recognition of the necessity to translate scientific insights into practical applications, the process—characterized by Mosse as a “black box”^[43] (p.643)—remains “slow and erratic”^[61]. Yet, the exigencies of crisis contexts frequently act as accelerants, catalyzing the rapid conversion of research into actionable solutions and underscoring how emergency conditions can intensify the integration of scholarly knowledge into practice.

In the aftermath of the emergency, the pioneering Epi-

dem Language Service Corps (ELSC) was launched on February 10, 2020. Conceptualized by a consortium of eminent Chinese linguists and formally endorsed by the Ministry of Education and the State Language Commission, the ELSC mobilized critical linguistic resources to serve both local and foreign residents. Key initiatives included the *Hubei Dialects Glossary for Fighting Epidemic*, *Foreign Language Glossary for Fighting Epidemic*, and *Concise Chinese for Fighting Epidemic*. Notably, the *Glossary*—which compiled 75 essential sentences covering daily precautions, entry requirements, common medical consultation phrases, and personal protective measures—was translated into 41 languages between March 1 and April 22, 2020^[51] (p. 3). This corpus was further adapted into micro-videos and multimedia cards, and integrated with an online inquiry system accessible via both WeChat and the web^[62] (p. 26). The ELSC thus functioned as a vital conduit of multilingual information, effectively bridging communication gaps and enhancing accessibility for foreign nationals during the crisis.

The establishment of the ELSC provided a foundational framework for subsequent localized crisis translation initiatives. A notable example is the “Language Doctors Protecting Shanghai” (LDPS) program, launched in response to the Shanghai lockdown in spring 2022. This initiative represented a coordinated effort by faculty and students from leading universities, in partnership with the International Education Association Shanghai, consulates, and the local language service provider TransOn. Leveraging the TransOn platform, over 400 student volunteers delivered free, real-time translation and interpreting services across more than ten languages to foreigners, community workers, and couriers via text, voice, or video, with an average response time of just two minutes^[63]. This model highlights not only the scholarly emphasis on experiential training for crisis translation talent^[64, 65], but also demonstrates the efficacy of cross-sector collaboration and the strategic integration of digital technologies in facilitating rapid, multilingual communication during emergencies.

Increasingly recognized by scholars for its significance^[49, 64], crisis translation talent cultivation has gained substantial momentum nationwide. To mitigate the pressing shortage of qualified personnel, Beijing Language and Culture University has integrated Emergency Language Services (ELS) training into its curriculum, positioning itself

at the forefront of developing specialized linguistic competencies. Similarly, Tianjin has pioneered the “One Base and Three Banks” (OBTB) model, comprising a central talent cultivation base supplemented by a talent reserve bank, a research bank, and a multilingual corpus bank. Within merely two years, the OBTB has assembled a cohort of over 700 translators and interpreters proficient in more than 20 languages. Furthermore, a range of other institutions has leveraged domain-specific expertise—such as medical science and technology—and diverse linguistic capabilities, including sign language, braille, and minority languages, to establish a presence in this expanding field. Collectively, these initiatives exemplify adaptive, multifaceted strategies for cultivating crisis translation talent and underscore the pivotal role of academia in shaping a workforce capable of navigating the linguistic complexities inherent in global crises.

The preceding examples underscore the pivotal role of scholars in bridging the divide between academic research and practical application. These scholars adeptly transformed theoretical knowledge into actionable strategies, substantially advancing the crisis translation movement across China. Weichselgartner and Kasperson^[66] (p. 273) critique the conventional pipeline model for its ineffectiveness in knowledge transfer, wherein scientific findings are presumed to disseminate automatically into practice. By contrast, the scholars examined here assume multifaceted roles—not only serving as policy advisors and collaborators with language service providers (LSPs), but also as trainers of volunteer translators and interpreters, and as active practitioners themselves. This comprehensive engagement facilitates the seamless integration of academic insights with the exigencies of crisis contexts. Such synergy not only reinforces the interface between theory and practice but also exemplifies the academic community’s capacity for rapid, context-sensitive responses to global challenges, leveraging expertise to address critical societal needs.

3.4. Practice-to-Scholarship: Research Journey Cut Short

As articulated by previous scholars, scientific progress does not unfold in isolation from practical contexts^[67] (p. 515); rather, practice constitutes a generative source of hypotheses for scientific inquiry, offering both inspiration and

an empirical testing ground that ensures scholarly work remains socially relevant and intellectually robust^[68] (p. 56). Within the domain of crisis translation, the extensive involvement of Chinese scholars in organizing, coordinating, and directly participating in translation initiatives during the public health emergency, in principle, should have catalyzed sustained academic development. Early post-crisis reflections indeed attest to the productive potential of such practice-informed scholarship^[51, 62].

Yet, despite this promising outset, the development of crisis translation studies in China has encountered premature stagnation. The initial surge of scholarly enthusiasm waned rapidly, a trajectory shaped by a constellation of contextual pressures. Researchers and journal editorial boards alike exercised caution, constraining the dissemination of crisis-related studies. This cautious posture was further reinforced by utilitarian research incentives, which redirected academic attention toward topics deemed more immediately publishable or rewarding. In this regard, Watson’s assertion that scientific assessments must eschew value-laden judgments to achieve their full potential^[55] (p. 473) underscores a tension central to the field’s evolution. Nevertheless, as scholars have observed, researchers are never fully neutral actors^[60] (p. 822); their choices are inevitably conditioned by prevailing sociopolitical climates. Such a lack of neutrality becomes particularly salient when ideological sensitivities discourage revisiting the emotionally and politically charged experiences of the pandemic—experiences that external observers, often lacking full contextual understanding, sometimes evaluate critically^[69]. Within this broader landscape—where research agendas privilege immediate publishability over sustained societal relevance—the transition from practical engagement to deeper scholarly inquiry is inadvertently hindered^[66] (p. 273). Consequently, crisis translation, once characterized by prolific publications, symposia, and funded initiatives during the emergency, has been relegated to a largely transient, event-driven subject.

This stagnation signifies far more than a temporary ebb in scholarly attention; it fundamentally compromises the institutional and epistemic sustainability of the field. Absent sustained engagement, crisis translation risks failing to coalesce into a coherent research program. Theoretical frameworks remain underdeveloped, empirical evidence fragmented, and policy implications tenuous. Most critically, the

lack of longitudinal inquiry impedes the identification of structural patterns, the assessment of long-term policy outcomes, and the design of resilient mechanisms for future emergencies. The loss extends beyond mere momentum, encompassing the very conditions requisite for the field to endure, evolve, and exert lasting academic and societal influence.

Against this backdrop, the imperative to reinvigorate practice-informed scholarship becomes increasingly salient. Advancing crisis translation research necessitates the application of both “falsifiability and utility criteria”^[70] (p. 486) to assess scholarly contributions, while simultaneously acknowledging the inherent limitations of practice-oriented approaches, particularly their “lack of a coherent and consistent metatheoretical basis”^[71] (p. 354). Contemporary scholarship advocates the integration of local knowledge and grassroots practices not merely as objects of inquiry, but as valuable epistemic resources^[11] (p. 503). A nuanced perspective is therefore required—one that recognizes the “productive interplay” between scholarship and practice^[68] (p. 63) and that incentivizes academics to engage substantively with real-world challenges while navigating political, institutional, and disciplinary constraints. By extending inquiry beyond the confines of the ivory tower toward a more grounded and socially engaged orientation, the field can safeguard the theoretical rigor, empirical validity, and practical relevance of its contributions.

4. Conclusions

The policy-practice gap constitutes a persistent conundrum that has long challenged the scholarly community. To address this, we advance the Policy–Scholarship–Practice (PSP) continuum as a methodological framework, emphasizing the pivotal role of scholarship in mediating between policy formulation and practical implementation. The deployment of China’s linguistic strategies during the 2020 public health emergency provides an illustrative case study for this framework. Our analysis indicates that, stimulated by innovative—albeit often implicit—policy directives on the linguistic dimension of crisis management, a nascent research domain—Emergency Language Services (ELS), closely aligned with Crisis Translation Studies—has emerged robustly in China. This scholarly momentum has, in turn,

informed the development of more coherent and actionable national policies for embedding language services within crisis response systems. Across the country, scholar-led initiatives have spearheaded multi-tiered crisis translation campaigns and talent development programs, tangibly enhancing societal resilience and well-being. Yet, despite these achievements, the advancement of Crisis Translation Studies has encountered premature stagnation, constrained by entrenched paradigms and utilitarian research incentives. Collectively, these observations elucidate the mediatory function of scholarship in bridging policy and practice, facilitating the creation of adaptable policies, dynamic research agendas, and expansive practical applications. Notwithstanding the curtailed progression of crisis translation research in the aftermath of the emergency, stakeholder collaboration has been notably effective, exemplifying the principle of “co-producing knowledge”^[66] (p. 267), which underscores the indispensable collective efficacy of policymakers, researchers, and practitioners in generating substantive and socially meaningful outcomes.

One potential limitation of this study lies in the terminological duality observed between Emergency Language Services (ELS) and crisis translation. Although these terms converge conceptually within our analytical framework—supported by Jakobson’s tripartite classification of translation^[72], which situates crisis translation within a broader conceptual horizon—we have deliberately retained both terminologies, cognizant of the potential for reader ambiguity. This choice reflects a commitment to acknowledging the concerted efforts of contemporary Chinese scholars in “constructing a discourse system imbued with Chinese characteristics”^[73], an endeavor of considerable scholarly significance. Furthermore, while this study elucidates the intricate interrelations among policy, scholarship, and practice, it also highlights the necessity for further investigation into the potentials and constraints inherent in the proposed PSP continuum. Such exploration would entail a detailed examination of the procedural mechanisms, contingent variables, and contextual determinants shaping these interactions. Ultimately, this research seeks to catalyze rigorous theoretical and empirical discourse on crisis translation, equipping stakeholders to navigate the complex, iterative processes of knowledge translation and thereby contributing substantively to the broader field of crisis management and response.

Future research on crisis translation should pursue both methodological sophistication and conceptual expansion to address the growing complexity of global emergencies. Quantitative approaches—including large-scale corpus analyses, statistical modeling, and machine learning—can generate robust evidence regarding the efficacy and impact of Emergency Language Services across diverse policy and practice contexts. Longitudinal investigations are necessary to trace the evolving dynamics between policy and practice over time, thereby revealing patterns and mechanisms that can inform sustainable strategic interventions. Comparative and collaborative studies across regions and nations can facilitate the co-construction of best practices while accounting for heterogeneous sociocultural and institutional settings. Furthermore, in the digital era, scholarly inquiry should critically examine how technological interventions—such as AI-assisted translation platforms, multilingual information systems, and digitally mediated volunteer networks—reshape crisis translation strategies, resource allocation, and societal outcomes. Integrating these methodological and conceptual approaches will not only advance theoretical understanding but also yield actionable insights for policymakers and practitioners, ultimately fostering a more resilient, adaptive, and sustainable field of crisis translation research.

Author Contributions

L.Q. contributed to supervision. Q.L. was responsible for conceptualization, data collection, and drafting the manuscript. Both authors participated in reviewing and editing the manuscript and approved the final version.

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The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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