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THE CASE FOR METHODOLOGICAL RIGOR

A Response to Lyster and Ranta

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We wrote our article on the basis of our long-held belief that methodological rigor is essential if research is to drive the field of SLA forward. Although we focused our discussion on methodology in the case against recasts literature, we also explicitly stated that "we certainly do not intend to imply that the case for research has no room for methodological improvement" (p. 157) and made similar points about issues such as extra exposure being "a potential threat to a wide range of SLA research" (p. 157). Lyster and Ranta reject all methodological criticisms, frame our article as "devaluing longitudinal research" and "reductionist," and claim we argue that "lab research is the only option" (p. 170). We emphatically do not argue that lab research is the only option; what we say is that "both, obviously, are legitimate directions for research" (p. 157; see also pp. 149 and 159). Arguing for methodological rigor is not the same as arguing for lab-based research because, as we point out, methodological soundness should be the goal of all types of research, regardless of whether it is classroom based or lab based (or naturalistic). Believing researchers should strive for rigor does not imply that we are hostile to any particular kind of research in educational settings where "practitioners naturally and appropriately prioritize instructional goals

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and learner needs over the needs of researchers" (as pointed out in McDonough & Mackey, 2013, p. vi). There are a number of inaccuracies in Lyster and Ranta's response, including mistakes about others' work—for example, Long, Inagaki, and Ortega (1998) did not use translation—and misinterpretations of what we actually said—for example, contrary to their claim that we utilize references that "completely miss the point that we now know that rates of uptake vary from context to context" (p. 171), we say that "to what extent recasts lead to uptake seems to be a context-dependent question, in which the language and classroom setting, task, and instructor framing are important considerations" (p. 137). Rather than going one by one through Lyster and Ranta's misrepresentations, we instead suggest that readers examine the primary sources, including our article, for themselves and make their own objective judgments about our critique of the methods used in the small set of studies against recasts. In the end, despite Lyster and Ranta's attempt to recast our thesis as devaluing longitudinal classroom research, the only type of research we devalue is that which is poorly designed.

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