Recent research in first and second language acquisition has indicated that the adult native speaker's adjustment of register when speaking to a learner plays a significant role in promoting second language acquisition. Brown (1977) characterizes motherese, or babytalk (BT), as the simple code spoken to infants. This code is heavily charged with affective meaning; its principal goal is communication, not language teaching. For second language acquisition, Krashen (1981) emphasizes the need for comprehensible input at the appropriate interlanguage level.

In light of these considerations, the study reported here is being conducted to find the similarities and differences between a pop song register (PS) and simple and simplified codes. Brown (personal communication) has suggested that there may actually be several registers involved in PS which correspond to different musical styles (country, punk, heavy metal, and so on), styles which address different needs in different audiences. For the purposes of
The report, PS refers to the song that is analyzed and any songs similar enough to produce the same results. Our working hypothesis is that PS might be considered the "motherese of adolescence" and could provide valuable input to the second language learner.

Steve Wonder's pop song, "I Just Called to Say I Love You" (1984), which was number one on the hit charts in the Swiss-German area of Switzerland and number five in the French-speaking area on November 4, 1984, was analyzed following Brown (1977). He finds it useful to represent the human infant as + inspiring affection, + tenderness, + intimacy, and - verbal production, - verbal comprehension, and - cognitive competence. By changing the negative values to positive ones, the adult lover can be represented. Wonder's song is also + inspiring affection, + tenderness, and + intimacy (not toward itself, but toward others, by a process of identification discussed below). Although PS does contain verbal production, it is in a frozen form which allows for no spontaneous adjustment or creativity. The song itself clearly has no capacity for comprehension - except insofar as the writer intuitively comprehended the need for affective communication on the part of his listeners when he created and "froze" the message — and no cognition of its own. In effect, PS can be conceived as a receiver-controlled communication, in that the listener in most instances chooses whether or not to receive the message and can, without fear of reproof, be attentive or not or even turn the message off. PS, then, is essentially a nonthreatening, nondemanding, affective, communicative "teddy bear-in-the-ear." In this kind of receptive language contact, recommended by such methodologies as Suggestopedia, TPR, and the Natural Approach, the L2 learner need produce nothing. "I Just Called to Say I Love You" is structurally a simple code. The average phrase length is 7.02 words, or 8.28 syllables, with 53 percent of the 248 words monosyllabic and 57 percent of the text based on 18 different words. By one rough measure of phrase and wordlength (Gunning 1968), it is equal to the reading level of a child after four years of school. (More precise measures of auditory comprehension difficulty are being sought.) The pauses after phrases are either half (17 percent), three quarters (29 percent), or wholly (63 percent) as long as the utterances that precede them; pauses of the latter kind may allow echoic memory to process and shadow effectively in real time (see Sievick 1976).

In their typology of texts, Bain, Bronchard, and Schneuwly (1985) distinguish among discours év situation, discours théoriques, and narrations. Wonder's song is by definition a narration, a text made for the enjoyment of a sociocultural group which did not participate in the production of the text. However, when analyzed more closely, it has many of the features of situational discourse (defined as a text coproduced by the participants, who are also the target audience, interacting with each other, as in a conversation): use of first and second person pronouns, present and past tense verbs, and an elevated density of verbs (80 for every 100 words). Thus, the song creates a situation rather than telling a story and involves the listener in a type of pseudo-dialogue or conversation.
The use of pronouns (24 occurrences of I, 5 of you) and non-specific copulas (the weather, standard celebrations, and so on) permits this listener identification, or je d'identification (Besvenetnse 1972, Rattunde 1974). In BT, the first and second persons singular are generally avoided in favor of nouns and first person plural (Baby tired? We no-no.). In PS, it may be significant that and you predominate at a time in life when the child's egocentrism is threatened by adolescent world-awareness and adult stress. But what is most important in PS is that the I in the song becomes I the listener by identification; precise referents are rare, so that everyone can maintain the illusion that the singer's words are his or her own. Certain features of BT, including nursery pitch (the higher fundamental frequency used to address infants) and avoidance of semantically empty forms, facilitate the child's identification; perhaps on a different level, adolescents react similarly to PS.

The preliminary stages of this research raise several interesting questions. Are the linguistic features of PS described above widespread or possibly even universal, crossing the boundaries of different musical styles? What role does the music play in the register? Does it facilitate, complicate, or render unimportant the degree of linguistic comprehension? To what degree can we actually consider PS as affective foreigner talk, involving L2 students in affectively charged communicative situations? How and to what degree can PS be exploited in an L2 classroom? What effect does passive contact with PS, estimated at over eight hours a week for Swiss youths (Murphy 1984), have on L2 acquisition?

The authors are currently comparing hit songs from different genres, languages, and time periods to "I Just Called to Say I Love You."

REFERENCES


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BRIEF REPORTS AND SUMMARIES 795
I JUST CALLED TO SAY I LOVE YOU
MCI 6 Lyrics: Stevie Wonder
No New Year’s Day to celebrate
No chocolate covered candy hearts to give away
No first of spring
No song to sing
In fact here’s just another ordinary day
No April rain
No flowers bloom
No wedding Saturday within the month of June
But what it is, is something true
Made up of these three words that I must say to you
I just called to say I love you
I just called to say how much I care
I just called to say I love you
And I mean it from the bottom of my heart
No summer’s high
No warm July
No harvest moon to light one tender August night
No autumn breeze
No falling leaves
Not even time for birds to fly to southern skies
No Libra sun
No Halloween
No giving thanks to all the Christmas joy you bring
But what it is, though old or new
To fill your heart like no three words could ever do
I just called to say I love you
I just called to say how much I care, I do
I just called to say I love you
And I mean it from the bottom of my heart
I just called today I love you
I just called to say how much I care, I do
I just called to say I love you
And I mean it from the bottom of my heart, of my heart
of my heart
I just called to say I love you
I just called to say how much I care, I do
I just called to say I love you
And I mean it from the bottom of my heart, of my heart,
Baby of my heart
© 1984 Sony Music Black Bull Music
Stevie Wonder, Syntexters, Howard, Drum, Yamaha F120
Record: Stevie Wonder

Number 1 on the hit charts for Swiss-German Speaking Switzerland
Number 5 in French speaking Switzerland (9 weeks on the charts)
for Nov.4, 1984.