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### ***Irritable vowel syndrome***

Flashcards. Whoever dreamt that up? Must have been demented. The idea was simple enough. Use a pictorial representation of the word you are trying to convey through the foreign language to help the learner gather the meaning of the word without (and here is the heresy that dare not speak its name) having to resort to ... English. Simple enough. *Un chien*. Show picture of dog. (Wot's that, sir? Looks like a pig with a rupture). *Une maison*. Show picture of house. (Our house hasn't got four windows / a garden / a garage / a roof / any bricks / any doors etc). But then comes the real challenge – and the thing that made me give up any idea of creating my own flashcards. *Vite*. At this point commercial artists temporarily take leave of their senses and forget that they are trying to convey to childlike little souls the simple meaning of the word 'quickly.' They come over all post-modern and artistic and draw a demented chicken racing like a lunatic across a farmyard being followed by a snarling axe-wielding farmer.

Teacher holds up said flashcard of panic stricken poultry.

“Répétez. Vite”

Pupils: “Vite” (and thinking “**chicken crazy**” )

The next shows a bull rushing maniacally around a china shop shattering everything in sight (why on earth do they use animals to describe adverbs?)

“Répétez. Soigneusement”

Pupils: “Swanoosemon” (and thinking “**china smashing**” )

The third and final one in this sequence displays a Cheshire cat grinning malevolently and about to pounce on an unsuspecting little mouse:

“Répétez. Heureusement”

Pupils: “Herurrzemon” (and thinking “**psychopathic**” )

So, when asked to put one or more of these newly learned words into a sentence, one pupil comes up with an offering that can roughly be translated as:

“My brother runs like a crazy chicken for the bus whilst my psychopathic sister smashes all the china in the house.”

The teacher is delighted at the correct usage of three adverbs, the inspector is impressed by the pronunciation of the pupil and the pupils continue to think the French barmy and the learning of French akin to dubious psychological practices carried out by armies in defiance of the Geneva convention.