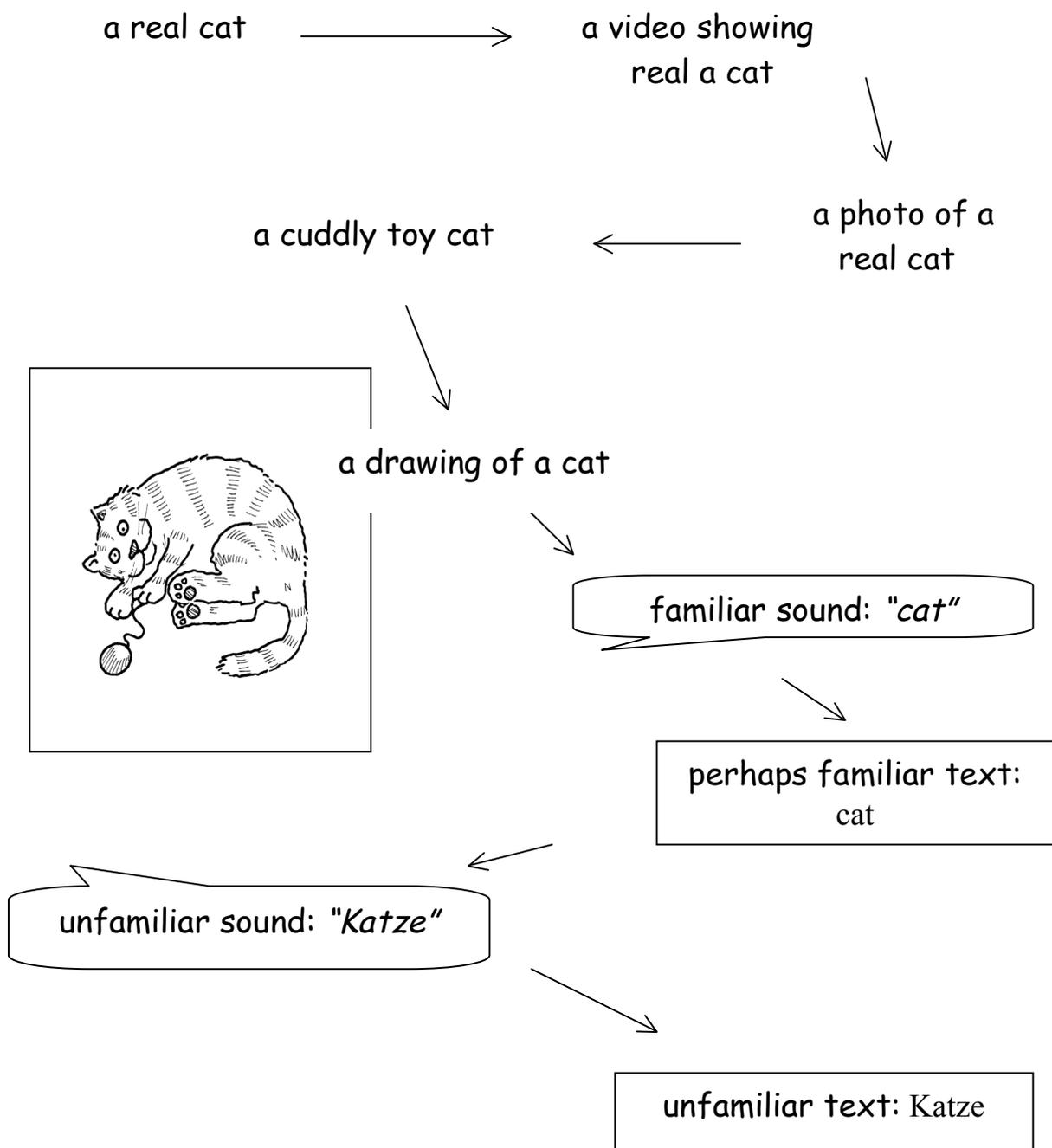**INTRODUCING NEW CONCEPTS**

Learners who struggle to understand language often have difficulty with the way that concepts are presented.

In MFL, in the early stages, at least, the language used is generally very straightforward and deals with concepts that will already be very familiar. How those concepts are introduced, however, may make language learning more difficult than it need be. The simple example below shows eight ways of introducing the concept 'cat' to learners of German; you can probably think of several more.

a real cat ⟶ a video showing real a cat

⟶ a photo of a real cat

a cuddly toy cat ⟵ a photo of a real cat

a drawing of a cat

familiar sound: *"cat"*

perhaps familiar text: cat

unfamiliar sound: *"Katze"*

unfamiliar text: Katze

The item at the start of the line of arrows , a real cat, might be difficult to provide in the classroom, but a video or photograph of a real cat (particularly one known to the learner) might be equally effective. Further away from reality, but at least three dimensional and capable of being handled, might be a cuddly toy cat, or a model of some sort. A drawing is a further step away from reality, but still appeals to visual sense. Once past that, the items become more difficult because there is nothing in the way they look or sound to suggest the concept of cat. Naming the concept aurally in the learner's mother tongue is likely to be understood, since it is so familiar, but linking it to an object or pictorial representation will do two things: it will confirm to an anxious learner that he/she is understanding correctly; and it will provide a point of reference or 'hook' that can be carried over to the more difficult presentations of the concept, *viz* the written word in the mother tongue (if used), the sound of the word in German and the written word in German.

Not all of these steps need or could be employed, of course. The important thing is not to jump immediately to conceptually more difficult items without first introducing the concept in a more comprehensible way, and then using that 'prop' as a means of support for the learner, not just in the first lesson, but as a reassurance and means of revision in subsequent lessons.

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A teacher who attended one of my workshops provided an excellent example of how the use of pictures assisted recall.

Encountering the word 'perroquet' in a text, some weeks after having covered a topic on Pets, a learner was baffled. When reminded of the lessons on pets the learner claimed not to remember ever having covered such a topic. Eventually the teacher pointed out the picture of a parrot that she had used to illustrate the word 'perroquet'. "Oh yes, that's perroquet!" cried the learner. "I remember now. And we learned 'chien', and 'chat' and 'tortue', and...."

H McColl, February 09