ENGLISH UNLOCKED

HOW WORDS REALLY WORK

TextProject
Background Builders

Why Jokes Are Tricky in Different Languages

Have you ever tried to tell a joke from your native language into English? It may not have worked very well.

Here's why: Jokes often play with words that sound the same but have different meanings. In English, we call these puns. Here's an example of a pun in English:

"Why did the bicycle fall over?
Because it was two tired!"

Do you get it? Bikes have "two tires". "Two tired" sounds just like "too tired" (sleepy or needing a rest). The bicycle has two tires, but it also sounds like the bicycle needs a rest!

This joke only works in English. If you translate it word-by-word into Spanish, Chinese, or Arabic, it makes no sense. Why? Because other languages have different words for "two," "tired," and "tires." The sounds don't match up anymore.

The many meanings of many English words makes English perfect for making puns. But this also makes English jokes hard to translate to another language. It also makes it hard to understand jokes sometimes when you're learning English.

The same is true for jokes in your language. Think about the word tricks that you use to tell jokes in your language. Each language has its own special way of being funny.

Don’t Believe These Height Promises!

Do you want to be taller? Some companies try to trick you. They want your money. They sell fake products. These products don’t work!

Some ads say: “Our machine makes you taller!” The machines pull your legs. They pull your back. Ouch! That sounds painful. These machines can hurt you. They might make you a tiny bit taller for one or two hours. But then your body goes back to normal. A machine cannot change your height. Your DNA decides how tall you grow.

Some companies sell special pills. They sell special drinks too. The ads say: “Grow 4 inches in one month!” This is a lie. It is false advertising.

Good food helps you grow. Vitamins help you be healthy. But no pill can change your genes. No drink can make you taller than your DNA says.

Remember: Some companies use false advertising. That means they tell lies in their ads. Your height comes from your parents. It comes from your DNA and genes. Don’t waste your money on tricks! Be proud of your height!

Making Pictures with Words

You might think science books only use facts and numbers. But look again! Even in an article about how you grow, writers use figurative language—words that create pictures in your mind.

Figurative language means using words in creative ways, not just their exact meanings. When an author writes that hormones “flood your blood,” they don’t mean that there is a flood inside you. But this word helps you imagine hormones rushing everywhere quickly.

When the article says teenagers “shoot up” in height, you’re not actually shooting anywhere! This phrase makes you picture a plant growing fast toward the sun.

The author also says your DNA is like a “recipe for making you.” DNA isn’t really a recipe you can cook. But comparing it to instructions for baking a cake helps you understand how DNA contains step-by-step directions.

Why do writers do this? Figurative language makes science more interesting and easier to remember. Is the blood inside of me really flooding? Pictures in your mind stick better than plain facts.

Is the blood inside of me really flooding?

Making Words Shorter

English speakers and writers love shortcuts! We make long words shorter in two main ways.

Abbreviations turn long phrases into just a few letters. Think about DNA—that's short for deoxyribonucleic acid. Nobody wants to say that whole thing every time! Scientists use DNA constantly, so the short version saves time. You probably know other abbreviations too: TV (television), USA (United States of America), and LOL (laugh out loud).

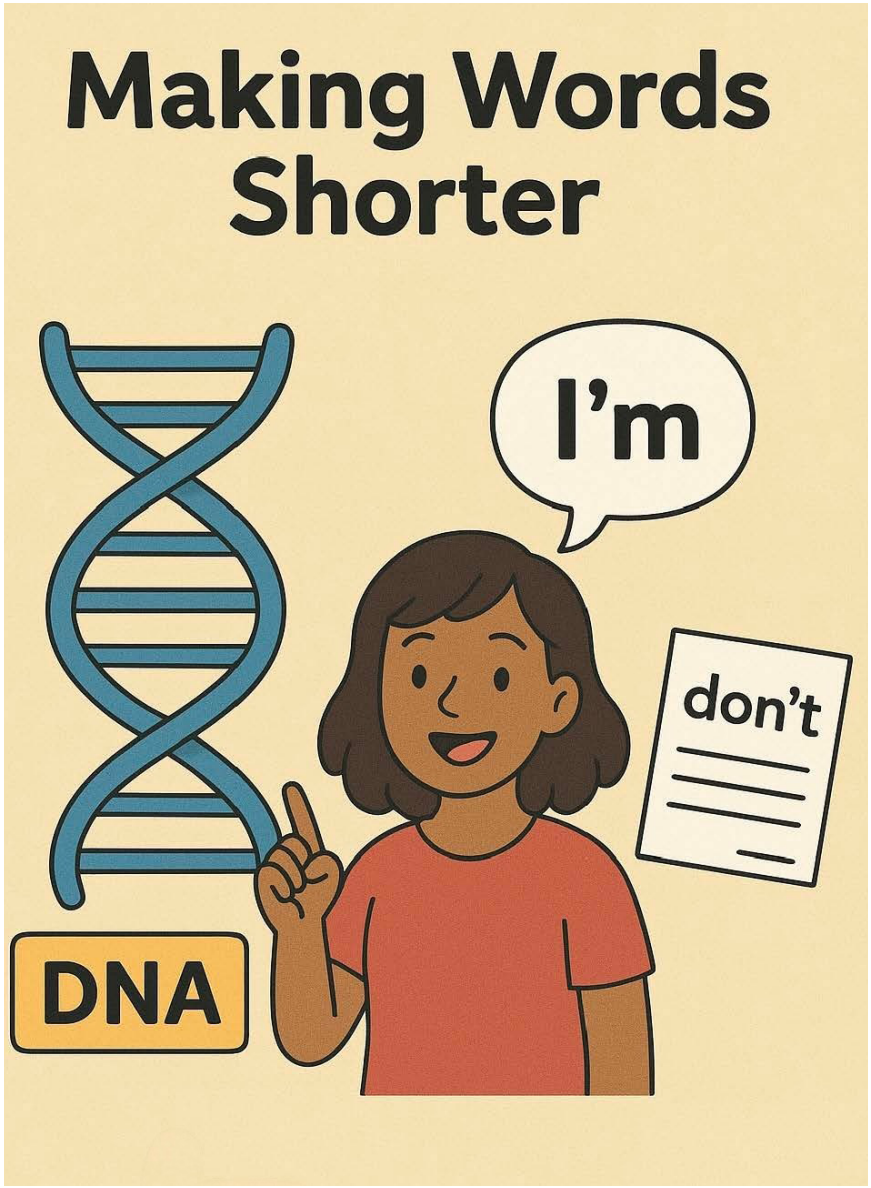
Contractions squeeze two words into one by dropping some letters. We replace the missing letters with an apostrophe (‘). Here are common examples:

do not→ don’t

I am → I’m

cannot → can’t

Both shortcuts make speaking and writing faster. When you’re texting a friend or having a conversation, contractions sound natural. Abbreviations are especially helpful because they keep the full meaning without making us pronounce hard words. Imagine saying “deoxyribonucleic acid” ten times in science class—your tongue would get tired! That’s why DNA is perfect. Three easy letters, same meaning, no tongue-twisters.



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