

CONTRACTIONS – OUCH!

Interesting things about contractions

- Contractions of a grammatical nature are important in all but the most specialised kinds of English, and used in just about all spoken English. We take them for granted (**don't** we?) but your learner may be confused. There is ample reason!
 - Contracted forms look, and often sound, different from the uncontracted form, especially as part of a longer phrase. (Think of the pronunciation of the “o” in **I do** not and **I don't**)
 - Sometimes contracted and the full form are similar. Sometimes, alas, they aren't. (e.g. he **will** not, he **won't**)
 - Sometimes the contracted forms of different verbs look the same. (he **has** and he **is** both become **he's**)
 - Some contracted forms sound like other words (e.g. **you're** and **your**, **they're** and...)
 - Sometimes there is more than one way of contracting a phrase (for he **is not**, do you say **he's** not, or he **isn't**? Why?)
 - NOT is often contracted, which can change the stress and pronunciation e.g. cannot - **can't**, do not - **don't**, have not - **haven't**. A few exciting ones, like will not - **won't** are like a whole new vocabulary item.

For your own delight and possible information

- Most contractions are to do with the present simple of *be* and *have*, and/or negative forms (e.g. am, is, are, have, has plus or minus NOT). A few examples:

I **am** - I'm, e.g. *Go away Petunia, I'm thinking*

He/she **is** - he's, she's, e.g. *Oh, there's Hyacinth. She's weeding the cucumbers.*

You/they **are** - you're, they're, e.g. *Look at the twins! They're in the cabbages again! You're quite sure they aren't allergic to greens, Flora?*

I/you/they **have** - they've, e.g. *You've been eating green tomatoes again, haven't you, Basil?*

He/she **has** - he's, e.g. *Where's Marigold been? I think she's been gone to buy compost with Violet.*

Practice practice

- Suggest you do the usual “noticing” thing with your learner, in context and a little at a time, during your conversations

By the way

➤ My own theory about contractions is this:

* English is a stress timed language. Each syllable does not get equal stress – only rarely do we stress two syllables one after the other. That makes sentences like those following rather clunky. Where does the stress go?

He will come tomorrow (HE will COME toMORRow? He WILL COME toMORRow?)

Zinnia will not come tomorrow (Zinnia will NOT COME tomorrow?)

*The “beat” of the sentence sits much more easily if we say it like this

He'll COME toMORRow

Zinnia WON'T come toMORRow

What's your theory?