

Keep your English up to date

Prenup

Professor David Crystal

We often abbreviate words by dropping the endings. There's a technical term for it in linguistics - they're called clippings. I suppose the word 'ad' is the most familiar, from advertisements. 'Pram' is another, from perambulator, and nobody uses that these days, really. And now, we've got 'prenup' which came in in the 1980s I suppose.

It's short for pre-nuptial agreement. In other words, it's two people who're coming together, and they're going to get married, they're going to have their nuptials, they're going to get married - and because they think the marriage is not going to last for very long and there's going to be a messy divorce, where they're going to have to split all their worldly goods, they decide to have a prenup, which is an agreement, a pre-nuptial agreement, where they decide who's going to have what, and it's going to save a lot of mess in due course. Funny idea really....but very popular amongst American film stars apparently.

Well, it isn't modern, actually. The earliest time I ever found any reference to it is 1916. So, it was very common in the United States during the 20th century and is increasing elsewhere. But the clipping, the abbreviated form, is very recent - I've only heard that since the 1980s. How do you write it? Well some people write it pre hyphen nup, but increasingly these days they've been dropping the hyphen, and the two elements are written solid, without any space or any hyphen in-between. The words have come together....not so of course the people they refer to!



bbclearningenglish.com

© British Broadcasting Corporation 2005

