

It's Urgent that You Wait

Mexican Spanish is versatile when it comes to questions of time and punctuality through use of the diminutive term, "ahorita"

by PinPoint Spanish

Spanish words ending in Spanish words ending in "ito" or "ita" are diminutive: indicating a smaller version of the noun in question.

Diminutives as euphemisms...

Diminutives are also used as a form of euphemism, especially for guilty pleasures. A dieter may go for "taquitos" rather than tacos, or round off a meal with a "pastelito" instead of pastel, while a drinker could order a "cubita" (a little rum and coke) if it looks a bit early for a cuba, or open the appetite with a "tequilita."

...except for now

An exception to this rule is "ahorita"—at least as it is often used in Mexico. As the diminutive of "ahora" —now— technically it should mean "right now," as in "ahora mismo," insofar as it suggests that less time ought to elapse between the promise and the fulfillment.

But things don't necessarily work like that. To start with, Mexico isn't particularly demanding about punctuality. Although timely arrivals are regarded as a virtue, excuses for tardiness are often treated with indulgence, especially if traffic is involved. So

"ahorita voy," means I'm on my way—or soon will be— but gives no fixed time.

A parent giving a child orders to clean their room, or get in off the street, would usually say "ahora" to mean right now, whereas "ahorita" could mean don't be too long about it. If the order is for this very second, the second-degree diminutive —ahoritita— may be used, leaving no doubt as to the urgency.

Other forceful options for right away, or at once, are "de inmediato," or "en este instante."

"En seguida" can also mean now, but is more like forthwith, suggesting it could be the next thing on the list, or to be done immediately.

"Ahora" also has its shades of meaning. If your plumber says he will come round "ahora" —ahora voy— to fix your dripping tap, it usually refers to "today," not that particular moment.

When asking 'when' doesn't work

Native English speakers occasionally use "when" if asking what time someone will arrive or something is scheduled. This doesn't work in Mexico. "¿Cuándo?" will be understood to refer to the day, the week, the month, or the year, but not the *time*. For this you have to be specific: "¿a qué hora?"

Of course, the answer could be "ahorita" and you'll be back where you started.

"Ya mero" is another versatile expression meaning soon—which can mean any second now, any minute now, or even any day now. In this case the diminutive "ya merito" suggests that the undefined time will be shorter than the undefined time in "ya mero."

Then, a final twist

The word for "then" —luego— contains a twist of its own in Mexico when the word is said twice. If someone completed a task or request in short order, they are said to have done so "luego luego" —fui al mecánico y luego luego me atendió— means the person was attended to immediately.