

EVERY 3 in *OED*: A grammatically neglected determiner (or two)

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Abstract

It is not unusual for grammar books to treat the determiner *every* as having one function only, viz. that of more or less parallelling *each*, disregarding cases such as *There is every reason* and *I wish you every happiness*. The present article is an attempt to redress the balance by critically assessing presentations in some of the major grammar books and in the canonical set of five dictionaries for learners. The end result is a tentative description of three different uses of *every*, *EVERY^{each}*, *EVERY^{possible}* and *EVERY^{complete}*.

Keywords: English, countability, determiner, dictionary, grammar, noun

Background

In February 2005, quite a few eyebrows must have been raised by teachers of English who had been avid readers of Quirk et al. (1972 and 1985) and other standard grammars when, on February 11, Tony Blair and his cabinet were reported to have sent to Buckingham Palace the message “We all wish them every happiness for their future together” (them being Prince Charles and Camilla Parker Bowles). Quirk et al. (1972: 139 and 1985: 257) and Quirk & Greenbaum (1973: 61–62) include *every* in a set of determiners defined by the property of occurring only with count nouns in the singular: *a(n)*, *every*, *each*, *either*, *neither*.¹ *Happiness* is definitely a non-count noun and thus unable to take *every* as a determiner according to major grammar books.

The instance quoted could of course be explained away as being formulaic and thus exempt from grammatical rules. The formulaic

¹ Etymology is outside the scope of this article, but as an ex-teacher of English grammar and word formation I find it interesting that the fairly neat distinction in use between *each* and *every* in present-day English is not an age-old one. *Every* started out as a combination of *ever* (as a booster) and *each* (as the head), found in Old English as *æfre ælc*, as described in *OED* s.v. *every*.

character is implicitly confirmed by the learner's dictionary *MED*:² "We wish you both every happiness in your future life together." Similarly in *CIDE*: "I'd like to wish you every [...] happiness in your new home."³

In Quirk et al. it is also stated (1985: 1241), perfectly correctly, that the only possible modification of a noun with *every* (as defined, my comment) as its determiner is of the restrictive kind.⁴ Another characteristic is said (1985: 1405) to be that a noun determined by *every* is an unlikely notional subject in existential sentences.

In Quirk et al.'s book, there is only one *every*.⁵ Hasselgård et al. (1998: 134) is in the same tradition. The same holds for Biber et al. (1999: 275), and the statistics presented there for *every* (1999: 278) simply refer to the string of letters, with no comment on different functions. But there is in fact at least one other *every* than the one defined by Quirk et al., and the usage in question is by no means isolated to the lexical item *happiness*. It has the opposite main defining characteristic, viz. that of occurring with definitely non-count nouns or with non-count senses of nouns with dual membership. It can also readily combine with both restrictive and non-restrictive modification and occur as a determiner in notional subjects in existential sentences.

² Throughout this article, I will be using the (semi-)official acronyms for dictionaries. The full titles are to be found in the list of references.

³ During a break from the present linguistic exercise, I happened to pass a TV set and was provided with a present-day American example in the TV series *The Mentalist* from 2014, episode 4. After concluding the sale of a (stolen) engagement ring to two undercover FBI agents, the jeweller bid them farewell with "I wish you every happiness."

⁴ For some reason, probably to do with the semantic notion of universality, in a restrictive relative clause with a non-personal antecedent preceded by *every*, the zero option for the relativizer in object position is next to obligatory (98 %), as shown by Olofsson (1981: 101). This is typical of all the so-called universal pronouns/determiners (*all*, *each* and *every*). Strictly speaking, the determiner does not go with the noun but with the whole complex of noun + clause, hence my use of "preceded" rather than "determined". See, for instance, the fairly non-technical demonstration in Olofsson (1981: 20).

⁵ Interestingly, Solveig Granath's countyman (yes, not only countryman but also countyman) Jan Svartvik, a member of "the gang of four" behind Quirk et al. (1972 and 1985), branches out with his colleague Olof Sager in a grammar for Swedish undergraduates (Svartvik & Sager 1978: 250) and mentions a second function of *every*, exemplified by "I'll give her every assistance (help, encouragement)", noting that *every* can occur with non-count nouns. However, as will be apparent below, their examples are not quite parallel with *every happiness*, cited above.

Even the superobservant grammarian Otto Jespersen missed (or at least omitted) this other *every*; there is a brief mention (six lines) in Jespersen (1949: 598), but the chapter in question was written by Niels Haislund, Jespersen being too old and ill to finish the final volume (no. VII) of his grammar on his own. Haislund glossed this *every* as “all possible, the utmost degree of”, which seems to echo in every detail *OED*, under *every* 3.⁶ Without stating the source, Haislund gave two examples from the dictionary, containing *every consideration* and *every prospect*. In addition, he provided two 19th-century literary quotations, containing *every use* and *every business*.⁷ Surprisingly, the grammarian refrained from commenting on the grammatical properties of the nouns involved.

Zandvoort (1965: 170) noted that *every* can be used with abstract nouns in the sense of “all possible”, using *indication* and *reason* as examples, but there is no mention of the degree sense found in the *every happiness* type.

Lexicography and grammar

In *OED*, even *OEDonline*, there is no later example of this *every* (presented under 3) than 1891 (*OED* simply quotes the list of examples invented for the 1891 instalment of its predecessor, *NED*): “I feel every respect for him”, “They showed him every consideration” and “There is every prospect of success”. The third example, by the way, demonstrates that “*every* 3” can readily occur as a determiner of the noun (phrase) in a notional subject in an existential sentence, a function in which the “standard” *every* does “not so easily” occur according to Quirk et al. (1985: 1405).

The absence in *OED* of instances later than 1891 can easily be misinterpreted as an implicit report of the death of *every* 3. However, this is only a reflection of the simple fact that the extensive revision

⁶ Actually, the “list of books” in Jespersen (1949: 1–40) has no entry for *OED*, only for its predecessor, *NED*, in spite of the fact that the change of name (and physical format) took place as early as 1933. This shortcoming is of no consequence, because in terms of content, the two are identical.

⁷ The *business* example reads in full “What business had I to take it out of your pocket? – Every business”.

programme for the online version has not yet reached *every*. The wording that James Murray and his colleagues produced in the late 1880s still stands. For the revision programme, I have sent to the present editors the following examples from 20th century literary sources.

However my daughters and I join in wishing you every happiness in your married life. (Evelyn Waugh, *Decline and fall* (1928, p. 141 in the 1937 Penguin edition), from a congratulatory letter composed by a head of school)

This she had done [...] from an early age with every naturalness. (Iris Murdoch, *The time of the angels* (1966, p. 38 in the 1968 Penguin edition))

Dictionaries for learners show considerable differences as to grammatical information about the use of *every*, including *every* 3.⁸ Their general defining style is functional (Svensén 2009: 241), i.e., semantic with a tinge of pragmatics. Typical wordings are “used when referring to”, “used for showing”, “used to emphasize”, and “you use **every** to indicate”.⁹

Traditionally, there has seemed to be little need for grammatical explanations in a dictionary mainly used for decoding, but the addition of an encoding function should have changed the situation in favour of grammar.¹⁰ Apart from the general tag “determiner”, grammatical terms and explanations are totally absent in *CIDE*, which is in line with the semantic focus of this dictionary. The same absence is noted in *LDOCE*. In addition to “determiner”, *MED* also has “singular countable noun”. *OALD* has “indef det”, “singular countable ns” and “abstract ns”.

⁸ For logistic reasons and for some degree of uniformity, I will be using the editions from 1995 (“the year of the dictionaries”) for the learners’ dictionaries *CIDE* (from its second edition, not used here, called *CALD*), *COBUILD*, *LDOCE* and *OALD*. For *MED*, which appeared later, the first edition (2002) will be used.

⁹ Surprisingly, only two out of five dictionaries (*LDOCE* and *OALD*) remember to include individuality in their definitions. To take one example of the opposite, *MED* has “used for referring to all the people or things of a particular type or in a particular group, or all the parts of something.”

¹⁰ Lord Quirk’s preface to the third edition of *LDOCE* may give the impression that the encoding function and the grammatical information are unique to this dictionary. However, in the first edition (1948) of the mother of all dictionaries for learners, *ALDCE*, in later editions known as *OALD*, A. S. Hornby mentions in his introduction the focus on idioms and *syntax* (emphasis mine), and as for encoding (without using the term), he says that “for writing English [the foreign student] will continue to find this volume useful.”

COBUILD, using its “Extra Column”, boasts the largest set of terms, but even so there is nothing about countability or abstractness. In order to cover examples such as “his every whim”, *COBUILD* (alone) makes an *ad hoc* reclassification of *every* and labels it “adjective”.

Table 1 lists the lexical items used to exemplify what I (following *OED*) call *every* 3. Bold face marks the one word that occurs in all five dictionaries, whereas those occurring in three out of five are italicized.

Table 1. Nouns used after “*every* 3” in example sentences

CIDE	COBUILD	LDOCE	MED	OALD
chance	care	chance	happiness	(combination) ¹¹
confidence	effort	hope	<i>intention</i>	opportunity
effort	<i>intention</i>	precaution	reason	reason
happiness	reason	reason	<i>sign</i>	success
hope	<i>sign</i>			
<i>intention</i>				
opportunity				
possibility				
prospect				
reason				
right				
<i>sign</i>				
success				

In my opinion, the set of examples for *every* 3 in *OED* is heterogeneous, which is actually hinted in the duality of the heading of section 3: “All possible”, “the utmost degree of”. There is a thin line between the two paraphrases proposed, but whereas the first one seems to go with amount, the second one explicitly refers to degree.¹² In the above table for learners’ dictionaries, it can be noted that clear-cut “degree” examples are found only in *CIDE* and *MED*, the two newest additions to the market, and in *OALD*. Also worth noting is the status of *every* *reason*, which seems to be a candidate for inclusion in the category of set phrases.

¹¹ The full example reads “He tried every conceivable combination of numbers”, which in my opinion illustrates the “standard” use of *every*. It was new to the fifth edition of *OALD* and was discarded for the sixth.

¹² This (potential) distinction is ignored in *CIDE*, where all the examples that contain the nouns listed under *CIDE* in this table are lumped together under the “guide word” (technical term in *CIDE*) GREATEST.

Conclusions

On the basis of observations in grammars, dictionaries and other sources, I would like to submit the following tentative description, using considerably more grammatical terms and concepts than the average learner's dictionary. On the other hand it is simplified as compared with the dictionaries, which often set up separate groups for adverbial functions of the whole noun phrase. In my opinion, there is no difference as to the function of *every* in relation to its head between "Every year has twelve months" and "We go to Italy every year".

EVERY^{each} is a determiner used with count nouns in the singular.¹³ It is normally possible to paraphrase such a construction by means of *all* + plural.¹⁴ Typically, the nouns involved refer to something or somebody actually existing in a group or set. **EVERY^{each}** can take a postdeterminer (or adjectival?) position after a genitive (including possessives). The individuality along with the universality can be strengthened through the expanded form *each and every*. Examples:

Every home should have one.

I'll be watching your every movement.

EVERY^{possible} is a determiner used with abstract count nouns in the singular or abstract non-count nouns (or non-count senses of nouns with dual membership), often referring to something not (yet) in actual existence.

You will be given every support.

¹³ It is not unusual to find statements, without further comments, to the effect that *every* goes with plurals, as in "every two weeks". This is a superficial and mechanical way of looking at things. The situation was correctly and concisely described a century ago in Jespersen (1914: 113): "Very frequently a unified plural is found after *any*, *no* and especially *every* ...". Regrettably, his nice term "unified plural" does not seem to have caught on to the extent that it deserves.

¹⁴ This simple rule of thumb was formulated "... the noun may be put in the plural and *every* replaced by *all*" in the first (1948) edition of *ALDCE*, but it is not to be found in any present-day dictionary for learners.

EVERY^{complete} is a determiner used with abstract non-count nouns (or non-count senses of nouns with dual membership).¹⁵ The nouns are typically derived from gradable adjectives or otherwise semantically associated with gradability.

I wish you every happiness/success.

Famous (?) last words

To conclude, I have every^{complete} confidence that every^{each} reader of this will see that there is every^{possible} reason to improve the grammatical analysis and description of every^{each} **EVERY**.¹⁶

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¹⁵ The tag *complete* is not carved in stone. It is difficult to come up with something that is either neutral or widely acceptable in collocational terms. Other candidates are, for instance, *perfect*, *total* and *greatest*.

¹⁶ My computerized grammar checker marked *every happiness* and *every naturalness* as ungrammatical (faulty number agreement). I rest my case.

Lexicography

- ALDCE = The Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English. 1948. London: Oxford University Press.
- CALD = The Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary of English. 2003. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- CIDE = The Cambridge International Dictionary of English. 1995. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- COBUILD = Collins COBUILD English Dictionary. 2nd ed. 1995. London: HarperCollins Publishers.
- LDOCE = Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English. 3rd ed. 1995. Harlow: Longman Group Limited.
- MED = Macmillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners. 2002. Oxford: Macmillan Publishers Ltd.
- NED = New English Dictionary on Historical Principles. 1884–1928. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- OALD = Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary. 5th ed. 1995. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- OED = Oxford English Dictionary. 1933. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
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