THIRD WHICH:
ON THE GOWTH OF "AMERICANISM"
EVERY WHICH WAY.

by
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Foreward

I remember that I was slightly disillusioned when I first consulted
A Supplement to the Oxford English Dictionary I (1972) for a renewed
explanation concerning the growth of the Americanism every which
way, because it refused to accept the view of Webster's Third New
International Dictionary on the following, "prob. by folk etymology
That is, I was dissatisfied with the Supplement's entry, "for U.S.
read orig, and chiefly U.S.; also ever(y) which a way(s); ...; so
every which: whichever, every" (Supp. I: 988). I did appreciated,
however, the numerous examples that had been appended.

Actually, I had already felt a little frustrated with the explanation
of everywhich way in the main body of OED, where it ran in parallel
with other phrases like every mother's son and every now and then
(OED III, 1933: E-344). The suspicion I harbored against OED
concerned a seemingly insignificant inconsistency between the above
and the analysis it gave to each: "The early use of each corresponded
closely to the mod. use of its compound EVERY (=ever each)"
(OED III: E-2). If the editors had already scented out the root of
every to this degree in its various prototypes everich, euerilc, and
everyche, they had to account for every which way quite differently
from every mother's son and every now and then, given their reputation of being devoted to "historical principles". Surely, they could have demonstrated another way leading a hypothesis where every which would be interpreted as a product of splitting, for example every-itch, or rather as a metanalytical restoration of the former "ever each", with its split ending transformed into which through a kind of folk etymology.

As such, it seems likely that the editors of OED and Supp. are guilty of having painted themselves into a corner. They may have taken cover behind a conventionalism, feeling responsible for providing their readers with reliable information, especially given the ever-increasing pressure for empirical positivism during those three or four boom decades of structural linguistics. In fact, the growth of every which way had rarely been traceable in any written records before the latter half of the nineteenth century, even in the United States, perhaps because of its colloquiality. OED was, therefore, extremely prudent in dealing with the problem.

We may ask, however, whether we are morally prohibited from showing a few hypothesis about the origin of a word or phrase especially in a dictionary edited on etymological principles. Actually, OED does give a hypothesis on the generic process of each, where three different origins are supposed to have interacted with each other in five possible ways during the course of developing into the modern form (OED III: E-1-2). Far from being disappointed in their indecisiveness, we are always very grateful that they open our eyes to a rich possibility of further explorations. This is why I saw something lacking in the treatment of every which way in OED and Supp., and felt inclined to look for a philological framework that would reveal some British roots of the Americanism.
Every Which vs. Which Way

It is interesting to note that there is a discrepancy between OED and Wbs. in their dealings with an abbreviated equivalent or a partial extract of *every which way*. While Wbs. gives an independent entry to *whichway(s)* as an alternative to *every which way* or *where* (Wbs. 2603), neither OED nor Supp. mentions it even in their conscientiously detailed explanation of possible derivations or syn- onymies. On the contrary, whereas Supp. shows *every which* as an adjectival that has a certain derivational relationship with *every which way*, as mentioned before in the beginning of this paper, Wbs. neither accepts it as an entry nor in a supplementary explanation in spite of a willingness to admit ME *everich* into the historical background of *every which way*.

I think that “so” in the definition of *every which* in Supp. means “for U. S. read orig, and chiefly U. S.”, which also covers the lack of this entry in Wbs. The fact that Wbs. unintentionally concentrates upon *which way* may work out to be what an average American feels when he or she is assigned to analyze the grammatical structure of *every which way*. In fact, a result of the questionnaire I once carried out on a dozen educated Americans was that they almost unanimously supposed *which way* to be the core of *every which way*, except a female informant who had been trained in historical linguistics.

Although the interpretation above is nothing but a layman’s presupposition on the relationship between these two phrases, of which the former is usually taken for a word, *every which way* happens to fall into an endocentric type where *way* is the head of this word group and what precedes it (i.e. *every which*) are the tail. Accordingly, when one tries to make a minimum head-tail
relation here, in the light of grammatical consistency of present-day English, what one calls to mind is infallibly which way, keeping every in reserve for an additional modification. This stream of grammatical consciousness may be illustrated by the orthographic variety in the following examples.

(1) 1884 'Mark Twain' Huckleberry Finn xxi, The fences—leaned every which-way. (Craigie & Hubert, A Dictionary of American English on Historical Principles. 1838-44: 984)

(2) 1965 Listener 3 June 836/3 As for driving a motor-car looking every whichway and singing a duet, I hope that the Road Safety Council has already protested. (Supp. I: 988)

It is impossible for us to see whether it was the writer himself or the editor who spelled out whichway in a word or hyphenized it tentatively. Although we find every which way in Roughing It (1872) as well as everywhichway in Tom Sawyer, Detective (1897), the difference does not necessarily show a development in Twain's view of English grammar. Quite arbitrary as these spacings are, they never go well beyond the legitimate endocentricity in the case of the three-morphemic word or phrases above. Grammatical consistency also seems to work on a two-morphemic string. Thus, Americans will also employ the freely substitutional use of every which, which we can see in the following example with a noticeable British flavor.

(3) 1958 Times Lit. Suppl. (Suppl.) 15 Aug. p.x/2 Stacked up copies of every—which volume published in Great Britain since the prosperous thirties. (Supp. I: 988)

I do not know whether Britishers would regard this usage as a partial extract of every which way, but the most obvious explanation for this seems to be that it was imported from the U.S. Even so, it is also possible that ME everich has survived in the British soil for
more than five centuries through a dialectal or colloquial heritage. That is, if Britain is the only area infected with the living fossil, it is probably either (1) because it was imported as a detached part of the petrified Americanism, or (2) because it is a native descendant of the Middle English prototype. Although it is not necessarily apposite to the purpose of this paper to choose between these two alternatives, a trace that suggests the trend in (2) would also be enough to witness the British roots of every which way.

**Dialectal Background**

So far as it goes with every which, the dialectal equivalents in England were found in four East Midland shires when the *English Dialect Dictionary* recorded them in 1900 (EDD II: 266)

(4) Norf. *Every each* man have his swad on his thigh, in case o’ fear i’ the night, GILLET Sng. Sol. (1860)

(5) Suf. He didn’t take all the trees’ away; he took every each one (C. G. B.)

(6) Ess. As every Etch Sunday ded cum roun’, CLARK J. Noakes (1839)

(7) Hrt. *Every each* day, every day (H. G.)

They exemplify two important aspects of a process that might be inherent in the formation of every which way. One is that except every Etch in (6) they are reasonably in accord with the prevalence of every each as a legitimate descendant of everich in British English. Another is that, in spite of the currency of its rival, there still remains a checked vowel variant in (6) to give a vague view of the way to every which through the haze of history.

The geographical distribution of these two variants, however, does not help us to locate an imaginary birthplace of the Americanism,
because not only do the examples here extremely center around London as shown in the figure below, but also a scarcity of similar usages does not always deny their existence in other districts. In fact, the more we look back into the past, the more we find an unsplit prototype of the checked vowel variant everywhere, e.g. *eueryche* (15th C, Satchell 1883: 12) and *evrisch* (18th C, Axon 1883: 51).

![Figure 1. Geographical Distribution of *Every Each* and *Every Etch* in EDD.](image)

We know that the kind of free vowel we find in *each* is often a result of upgliding its unstressed equivalent in eastern counties, while western counties usually have its variant in the checked position (Kurath 1967: 98). Since –*ich* is an unstressed final member of an old compound, its first descendant is supposed to have been a morph with a checked vowel, which was closer to *Etch* than
to each (Kurath 1967: 83-7), though it may have already been on
the track to each, especially in the eastern dialects through the
sound change I have just mentioned above. If the checked vowel
prototype remained unchanged even for a little while, it would seem
to endorse the cradle of American English in the seventeenth
century (Kurath 1968: 126)

More important than pinpointing an imaginary birthplace of every
which somewhere in the British Isles, however, is unveiling a certain
phonological mechanism that may have given rise to its birth. It does
seem quite reasonable to suppose that either of the two descendants
of everich could have found its way into a form of unidentifiable
variant at anytime or any place. The fact that we find Etch in
Essex already shows that it is actually impossible to draw a geo-
graphical borderline between the two identifiable variants. Besides,
even if the shift from the checked vowel to the free one could be
explained by traditional philology beyond all doubt, what still remains
unsolved is the mechanism which brought wh- to the beginning of
detached -ich. There is no means to solve the problem in philology,
however, except for a supposition that which was adopted to give
form to the amorphous morph.

Derivations

It must be noted again that a phonology of metanalysis may
differ somewhat from either historical or paradigmatic sound change
in grammatical inflections or morphemic derivations, since there is
always a presupposed or misinterpreted form working the resultant
change around to its own way. It also seems true, however, that a
metanalysis does not occur at all unless a phonological spontaneity
has prepared an invisible receptor for the presupposition. The

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derivation of the three descendants from ME *everich* can probably be schematized as follows.

\[ \begin{align*}
(1a) \text{ever}-ch & \rightarrow (1b) \text{every} \\
(2a) \text{everi-ich (Etch)} & \rightarrow (2b) \text{every each} \\
& \quad \quad \rightarrow (2b') \text{every which}
\end{align*} \]

Figure 2. Derivations from *Everich*

The first derivations above lead to (1a) *ch*-weakening where the low powered consonant would finally fade away from the surviving ending, and (2a) *i*-duplication, through which the detached ending evolved into a germinal stage for coming independence, where the vowel would still remain checked. We may call the stage (2a) the first metanalysis since we have to expect further ones to form the two derivational branches, (2b) and (2b'). It is in this stage, therefore, that we must look for a possible condition or two for the transition to the next metanalysis.

Here, we must note that the difference between the checked and free vowel in the pair *-ich* and *each* can be simplified into the shift of a distinctive feature from lax to tense according to Jakobsonian phonology (Jakobson et al 1969, Cherry et al 1953). It is easy to see that when the vowel of *-ich* gropes for an initial consonant in agreement with its own laxness after a possible form of word, it will, with a little stretch of the imagination, fall in with /w/ to satisfy *which*. On the other hand, if the vowel assumes tenseness in harmony with the following coronal consonant, the disjoining ending will gain a sonority strong enough to attain the status of the word *each*. Although it may seem a little too easy to attribute a mechanism of metanalytic regeneration only to the agreement of a distinctive feature, tenseness often gives a tangible clue to some morphemic shift that occurs in a word-ending in association with a conditioning
of stress assignment. This is somewhat in accord with the suggestion Halle and Keyser made about the fundamental role of this feature (Halle & Keyser 1971: 3-4).

For example, ME -lic (-liche) became -ly when the tenseness of its vowel weakened into laxness under the condition -STRESS, which we also find here in the change from everich to every. The same prototype, though supposed to be different in etymology by the editors of OED, brought about -like through the intermediary form -lik, where the final consonant agreed with its preceding vowel in tenseness under the condition +STRESS. This is just what we find in the formation of every each from everich. Thus, the metanalysis we are now discussing also shows a phonological regularity at least up to a midway point where it still shares the substance with other historical changes whose traces have already been affiliated with the legitimate grammar no matter where the language is spoken, in England and the United States alike. This is, in the broadest sense, a continental shelf of the English language on which every which way stands as an island that surfaced beyond the Atlantic Ocean. Here we are to see the very stem of the British roots of the Americanism. What remains to be explained is the forward projection of laxness which is supposed to have brought wh- to the beginning of -ich.

An Invisible Root

If we formulate the illegitimate birth of which, it will probably be as follows.

(8) $\phi \rightarrow [C \ [ - \text{tense} ]] / \text{EVERY} \ [ + \text{tense}] [ - \text{tense}] C]$ # #

The reason for putting EVERY at the beginning of the right side is, needless to say, that the replacement occurred only after every
because of its peculiar etymology. That is, (8) does not necessarily have a universality that brings another product of the same or similar making, an evidence of the sporadic nature of metanalysis. The phonological framework of the output, however, may have a kind of stability that works as a receptor for other more or less idiomatic phrases whether they had a metanalytic background or not. In other words, even though the productivity is feeble enough to accept only a few coincidences, it may leave a possibility of analogy for every which or the like. Just like a grammatical analogy which is not always consistent in its realization as we see in the weakening or regularization of some of the OE strong verbs, a phonetic analogy often seems to remain within a small range.

Viewed in this faint light, the best approximation to the formula above is every whit where the articulatory point of the final consonant moves only from palate to alveolar ridge. Even if there were an unnoticed retroactive formation of whit from which, we will still have to give up looking for a probable variant of which because of the indubitable nominality of whit, however similar it may be in an aspect of the phrasal meaning. There are also a few dialectal phrases similar to every which at least in their phonological framework.

(9) Som. Every whip's while (Elworthy 1886: 237)
(10) Dev. Every whip and while (Chope 1891: 43)

Considering OE hwile and the phrase with it as nucleus an hwile which is still apt to be mistaken for a nominal as in for awhile, the difference between (9) and (10) seems almost insignificant, as well as supplying a kind of alliteration to supplement each phrase with an additional meaning of “time”. Here again, we are not allowed to regard every whip (’s) as etymologically cognate with
*every which* except for the very wishful supposition that *wh-* formed by the forward projection of laxness, retroacted to seek for an appropriate ending.

Thus, we can neither find a prototype of *every which* in Britain nor locate an exact mechanism through which it might have been brought forth on the same soil, only catching a glimpse of a faint analogy in a few resultant phonological strings. The only existence of *Etch* in Essex has somehow validated the reality of the first metanalysis to give a prospect of further changes into (2b) *every each* and (2b') *every which* in Figure 2 alike. The hypothetical forward projection of laxness, however, never occurr*d in England probably because of the preference for additional synonymy over a mere phonological compromise, though the prompt importation of isolated *every which* from American English may suggest an unconsciously prepared readiness for the derivation. This is, so to speak, an invisible root of the Americanism.

**Unblessed Birth**

To say nothing of Labov's warning (Labov 1965), we cannot explain the birth of *every which* only by an argument drawn from internal relations within the sound system of English. In written records, the outcrop of ME *everich* (Early MnE *eurych(e)*, *euerilk*) pushed out into the sixteenth century, preserved well especially in religious literature as well as in phrasal expressions like *all & euryche* (all and every) or *everychone* (everybody) in England. As we see in Langland's and other sermons, a seemingly dignified archaism often reflects a conservative aspect of colloquialism which always shows the rapid progress of historical changes. Actually, Nathaniel Bailey's *Universal Etymological Dictionary* gave an entry
to *everisch* as a dialectal variant in the eighteenth century (Axon 1883: 51).

Since the first English colony in America was named Virginia by Queen Elizabeth I in 1584, there had been abundant chances for *everisch* or the like to be absorbed into colonial English through various regional and class dialects that ranged from the middle class speech of tobacco planters to the vulgarisms of indentured servants and redemptioners. Thus, we find *everwhich* in some dialects of the South, from southeastern Missouri to eastern Alabama.


(12) 1908 e. Ala., w. Ga. Take *everwhich* (one) you want. (ib.)

(13) 1927 s.w. Mo.-n.w. Ark. Ozarks. *Ever which o’* them ‘ar saddles you—all want, jes’ holler. (ib.)

In fact, although *every which* does not make an independent entry in Wbs., its older variant seems closer to the ME ancestry (*everich*: *ever*+*each*), and still remains as a dialectal form in the same dictionary (Wbs. 788). As we see now in (11), the free, substitutonal use of *everwhich* seems to have interacted with the formation of *everwhichaway* or *every-which-away(s)*, which coincides with it in the breeding ground that spreads out through five states in the South (ADD: 199).

It seems highly probable that *every which way* surfaced from a lower-class dialect because the chances are very good that only a kind of illiteracy could display a creativity audacious enough to realize such a metanalysis.

(14) 1824 ‘A. SINGLETON’ Lett. 82. Children (in Virginia) learn from the slaves some odd phrases; as, *every which way*. (Supp. I: 988)
It may seem a little prejudiced to ascribe the genesis of this peculiar diction exclusively to "slaves", because it could also have a germ in other lower-class dialects. The observation above, however, falls in line with a general trend of the communal interaction between white plantation owners and their slaves before Emancipation, when there was actually no melting pot to fuse a fragment of Black English into a dialect of the poor white or vice versa (Dillard 1972: 186-222).

**Semantics of Metanalysis**

Here, we are getting into the reality of a metanalysis where there is an indisputable influence of another mechanism that triggers off the phonological device shown in (8). It is obvious that *everwhih* never occurred without a semantic identification with *whichever* where the two morphemic constituents replaced each other in permutation. That is, *everwhich* happened to realize an unexpectedly immediate succession from the ME prototype, without the intermediate stage of *i*-duplication in (2a) of Figure 2, simply by adding an aspirated rounding to the beginning of its third syllable under the magic spell of *which*.

Thus, what gave a stability to *everwhich* was a kind of adhesiveness which only a semantic texture could produce. We see that a core of metanalysis is always in a befuddled semantic and/or grammatical interpretation through which a fading constituent survives and carries over into another refreshed form. It was sheer coincidence that *whichever* and *everwhich* were quite similar in meaning as well as in grammatical function.

The contingency, however, does not seem to have a surplus productivity for the further derivations of *every which way*. It is
undoubtedly impossible to incorporate *way* into the petrified three-word phrase with only a limited semantic adhesiveness that links *ever* with *which* in the case of the two-morphemic word. There must have been another linkage at least between the two neighboring constituents *which* and *way*. Here, we must reconsider what the bulk of a dozen American informants showed in response to my questionnaire, because their intuition may have hinted at a fundamental mechanism that gave an irreplaceable nucleus to the three-word phrase.

If so, *every which way* seems to have originated from a docking of *everwhich* and *which(a)way(s)* linked by a common *which*. So far as *everwhich* could modify any nominal that agreed in a semantic or grammatical consistency, there must have been little probability that *way(s)* would monopolize the second or third membership of a phrase to be petrified in due course of time. What made the monopolization possible seems to have been the semantic adhesiveness that had supported *which(a)way(s)* either as a compound or a petrified phrase. It is not difficult to see that *which(a)way(s)* may have been standardized into *which way* through a rationalization by eliminating not only –*a*– (prob. worn down from *of*) but also –*s* that had originally been an adverbial ending derived from the genitive case of noun.

Once *which way* had been on the way to establish its own status, *ever* was supposedly brought in at a crisis because *everwhich way* stood no chance against *whichever way*, in so far as they competed with each other as alternatives for one and the same meaning. In order to survive the crisis, *everwhich* had to split in two to win its independence from *whichever* as well as to restore its original meaning by duplicating its ending which had already been absorbed into the
detached *which*. In concurrence with the changes in outer form, *every which way* began to assume a peculiar meaning which was, however, confusingly similar to that of *whichever way* at the core: in every direction or in a disorderly manner.

A recent trend in the usage of *every which way* has been more and more toward the latter—so much so that a casual glance always falls on an example of this meaning.

(15) I could see her close up now, a huge, broad Valkyrie–like figure, her stringy brown–gray hair sprouting *every which way* from her head, her large, formless breasts sagging lifelessly in the black sweater she was wearing. (Rosenbaum, R.A. ed. *Growing Up in America*, 1969, Asahi Press: 21)

(16) She looked horrified as she stood at the doorway, her hair flying *every which way*, deep black rings under her eyes. (ib: 31)

On the other hand, the former, signifying “in every direction”, does not seem to have lost its vigor either, given a little emphasized on the sense “exhaustively” as in the following example.

(17) We put him through the computer *every which way*. No agency connection whatsoever. (Deighton, L. *XPD*, 1981, Bantam Books: 235–6)

It must be noted that *every which* has given a few indications of freeing itself from the petrified phrase just like in British English, though the usage still remains in the range where the synonymity with *every which way* can be effected, for example, by adopting *direction* in place of *way*.

(18) D. RUNYON *Guys & Dolls* (1932) iv. 89 Other coppers are coming from *every which direction*. (*Supp. I*: 988)

What keeps the phrase in the synonymity seems to be a semantic uniqueness, which happens to be supported by the consonantal al-
iteration in *which way* in outward form. We have already seen the same device in *every whip's while* and *every whip and while*.

**Nowhere to Go**

Now, it is high time for me to round out this essay which has been fabricated mostly by conjectures that might link some relevant but unorganized phenomena toward the final formation of *every which way*. Whether OED does approve of the ME origin of *every which* or not, historical or dialectal evidence is enough to suggest a phonological possibility that *every which* could have been triggered at anytime for either of the cases in the second metanalyses. It did not occur, however, until some yokels in and around the lower Midwest or the deep South confused a colloquial offspring of ME *everich* with a permuted variant of *whichever*. All we know so far, however, is the predominance of the semantic factor as shown by the morphemic confusion in this case, without which the second metanalysis could not have been triggered in spite of the maturation of the phonological environment which had already been prepared in Britain when *every each* began to grow there.

Consequently, *everywhich way* gave us a third *which*, which is neither pronominal nor thoroughly determinative in the sense that it takes *every* before itself though it has an indubitable similarity to a relative adjective in relation to *way*. Although it seems of no avail to look for a grammatical qualification of a word which has long been petrified in an idiom, the product of hypercorrection shows that there can be a gradience even in distinctions among parts of speech (Bolinger 1961) when the rationalization in metaanalysis falls short of grammatical consistency. What brought such a contradiction into the grammatical structure of this phrase is nothing
but a heterogeneity of the British heritage against the more ordinary which way.

Thus, even if we have no proof to validate the ME origin of every which, circumstantial evidence does support the hypothesis to an extent where there is not the slightest shadow of doubt about it. Every which way has nowhere to go back except ME everich.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**


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