

A h-uile? Na h-uile?? Càch??? Gach????

Ever been confused by the three words Gaelic sports for all/every? It's one of those instances where Gaelic makes a fine distinction that English doesn't make, which is why this is a bit tricky for learners.

But it's actually not that difficult. Basically the distinction that Gaelic makes is whether the beings who are "all" doing something are doing the same thing together or different things but just at the same time. Let me give you an example:

Bha a h-uile duine ann an eaglais
Bha na h-uile duine ann an eaglais

In the first example, there is a bunch of people in a church - but they are all doing different things. Think of St Peter's in Rome, some are wandering around, some are talking on their mobile phones, some are praying for a new Mercedes Benz. In the second example however there is an implication that the people are in a church for a particular purpose, eg they are a choir group and standing in there all having a singalong. The clue to remembering the difference is the **a/na**: when you use **a**, you are focussing on the individual; if you use the plural **na**, you are focussing on the group as a whole.

Here's a few more examples:

Bha a h-uile ag obair gu trang
Bha na h-uile ag obair gu trang

In the first example, there's a lot of people who are working on their own somehow. They might be working on individual tasks or in different rooms in the same building. In the second example, you are focussing on the fact that there is a group of people in the same room working (as opposed to some other people scattered throughout the rest of the building) or that they are all working on the same task, eg they are all making a pizza.

Bidh a h-uile a' dol gu Beinn Nibheis
Bidh na h-uile a' dol gu Beinn Nibheis

Again, in the first example you are focussing on the individuality - there's a number of people going to Ben Nevis, but they are all going there in different cars, all bringing their own picnic. In the second example, people are going there as a group. They might all be on the same bus or belong to a hiking club which is on their annual New Year's Picnic on the summit. In any case, there is something more communal about the phrase with **na**. In a sense, **a h-uile** is more like each and **na h-uile** more like all, the whole lot.

So where does this leave **càch** and **gach**? Even though they look very similar, they aren't simply variations of the same word. **Càch** simply means 'the rest' of a group. Think of a group of people who are climbing Ben Nevis - the one's who are in front might at some point ask themselves **cà bheil càch?** 'where is the rest (of our group)?' **Gach** on the other hand just means 'all'. Why on earth another word for all? Well, the thing is that **gach** for one thing doesn't make the differentiation that we explained above. On the other hand it also used to be much more common but has been largely supplanted by **uile** in modern colloquial Gaelic. So where does that leave you? In a nutshell, if you are writing a high register text or making a fancy speech, you may want to throw in a **gach** here and there, but don't use it on the phone to your granny.