9. Particles, Interjections and Onomatopoeic Words

9.1 Structural Particles

Structural particles are function words used to express the structural or grammatical relationship between components of a sentence. The three most common structural particles in Putonghua are 的, 地, and 得 — all pronounced de, in the neutral tone.

Looking at structural particles from the point of view of HP orthography, two points require consideration: 1) the question of separation in writing, which is treated in the following section; and 2) the question of whether to differentiate the three de's in writing. These three homophonous particles are represented by three different characters in writing; would it perhaps be useful to create three different HP forms to differentiate them in HP writing? The basic principle of HP orthography is to take the language's sound system as the basis for spelling, and by this standard the three particles 的, 地, and 得 should all be written identically as “de.” But it may be desirable in certain situations (such as Chinese-language word processing and other computer applications, and in machine translation) to differentiate the three. In this case, they may be assigned different written forms: 的, the most commonly used, as “d”; 地 as “di” (an alternate pronunciation of this character); and the third, 得, as “de.”

Below follows a discussion of the usage and written forms of
the three de's and other common structural particles of Putonghua.

1) de 的

This particle occurs with higher frequency than any other in Putonghua, and its usages are more varied and complex than those of any other. According to statistical data, de 的 has a frequency of occurrence of 6% in written Putonghua; that is, de 的 appears on an average of once in every 17–18 words.

The principal function of de 的 is to link attributive words or phrases with their head words or phrases. The attributive preceding de 的 may be a noun, pronoun, verb, or adjective or a phrase functioning as any of these, a numeral–measure word phrase, prepositional phrase, or a number of other possibilities. The head word or phrase is always a noun or noun phrase. The relationship between attributive and head word can be possessive, modifying, restrictive, or other.

Researchers of HP orthography have in the past set up rules to govern when de 的 should be written together with the attributive preceding and when the two should be written separately; years of practical application, however, have proved these rules to be needlessly complex and ultimately unnecessary. For this reason, to the basic rules of HP orthography has been added one that states: when de 的 functions as a structural particle, it is always written separately from the words that precede and follow it. (There are a very small number of exceptions to this rule; these will be discussed below.) In the following section, the various kinds of attributive constructions in which de 的 appears are considered one by one, according to the nature of their attributive
component.

a. Noun or noun phrase + de

Attributive constructions of this type may be possessive, restrictive, or modifying in nature. Some examples of usage:

dìdì de shūbāo younger brother’s bookbag;
rénmín de quánlì rights of the people;
gǒu de jīdàoshēng the barking of a dog;
huā de xiāngwèi fragrance of flowers;
māmǎ de ài mother’s love;
zǔmǔ de sǐ death of a grandmother;
húlí de wēibā fox’s tail;
diànhēng de guāng lamplight;
xìn de nèiróng contents of a letter;
zhào pīn de bèi miàn back of a photograph;
tiē de lóngàn iron railings;
sùliào de wánjù plastic toys;
lishǐ de jīngyàn history’s experience;
dōngbiān de shùlín forest to the east;
tiānshāng de fēngzhēng kites in the sky;
jīn nián de jíhuò this year’s program;
bàngwù de xiǎo evening clouds;
Xǐào Wáng de mā Xiao Wang’s mother;
Lǐ Míng de lúnwén Li Ming’s dissertation;
Huáng Hé de shuǐ Yellow River’s water;
Běijīng shì de shìzhǎng the mayor of Beijing;
chūn shàng de chéngkè boat’s passengers;

dì qū shàng de shēngwù Earth’s living creatures;
the earth);
dànmén wǒ de shíshízi 大门外的石狮子 (the stone lions outside the gate);
wūguī diàncē de chēpíào 无轨电车的车票 (trolley bus ticket);
gāoshè jīguānqiāng de zìdàn 高射机关枪的子弹 (bullets of the antiaircraft machine gun);
Zhōnghuá Rènmín Gòngghéguó de zhǔxí 中华人民共和国的主席 (Chairman of the People’s Republic of China);
Hànzú hé Zàngzú de yǔyán yánjiū 汉族和藏族的语言研究 (linguistic research of the Han and Tibetan nationalities);
xīn xiū de lóufáng de yángtái 新修的楼房的阳台 (the balconies of the newly constructed building).

de 的 is written separately from a preceding noun or noun phrase even when the head word following is omitted.

Wǒ yào mǎi Zhōngwén de, bù mǎi wàiwén de. 我要买中文的，不买外文的。(I want to buy it in Chinese, not in a foreign language.)

Below are a few more examples of “noun + de” constructions. These are relatively unusual usages, as can be seen from the fact that the English translations give no suggestion of the presence of the particle de 的 in the original. Here again, de 的 is written separately:

Dàjiā dōu kǎi Lǎo Wáng de wánxiào. 大家都开老王的玩笑。(Everybody’s making fun of Lao Wang.);
Jīntiān wǎnhǎng qù kàn gējù Báimóndū, Xiǎo Liú de Xī’ér, Xiǎo Zhōng de Dōchūn. 今天晚上去看歌剧《白毛女》，小刘的喜儿，小张的大春。(We’re going to see the opera The
White-Haired Girl tonight, with Xiao Liu as Xi’er and Xiao Zhang as Dachun.:

b) Pronoun or pronoun phrase + de

Attributive constructions of this type are very close in form to noun or noun phrase + de constructions. A few examples:

wǒ de mǔqīn 我的母亲 (my mother);
nǐ de yǔsǎn 你的雨伞 (your umbrella);
tā de qūshì 她的去世 (her death);
wǒmen de zǔguó 我们的祖国 (our country);
shuǐ de qiānbǐ 谁的铅笔 (whose pencil);
zījī de shì 自己的事 (one’s own affairs);
zhèyàng de rén 这样的人 (people of that sort);
zěmeyòng de xìnggé 怎么样的性格 (what sort of a temperament);
tā zījī de cuòwù 他自己的错误 (his own mistake);
wǒmen dàjiā de kònghuà 我们大家的看法 (our opinion);
tā hé wǒ de lǎoshī 他和我的老师 (his and my teacher; or possibly, he and my teacher);
bǔguān nǐ wǒ de shì 不关你我的事 (no affair of yours or mine).

de 的 is written separately from a preceding pronoun or pronoun phrase even when the head word following is omitted.

Wǒ de huà le, jiè nǐ de yòngyòng. 我的坏了，借你的用用。(Mine’s broken; let me borrow yours.)

A few examples of less typical “pronoun + de” constructions (compare them to the “noun + de” constructions above):

Bié kāi tā de wánxiào! 别开他的玩笑。(Don’t make fun of him!)

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Jintiān kāihuì shì shuí de zhǔxí? 今天开会是谁的主席。
(Who’s the chairman of the meeting today?);
Yī dà duì pò xié, lǎn wǎnzi shénme de. 一大堆破鞋袜子什么样的。
(a pile of worn-out shoes, old socks and such).

c. Verb or verb phrase + de

Attributive constructions of this type are either restrictive or modifying in nature:

chōng de gē 唱的歌 (the song being sung);
xuéxi de cáolído 学习的材料 (materials for study);
qīnje de dōolù 前进的道路 (the path of advance);
jīlái de xīn 寄来的信 (the letter that was sent);
chēngzhē de sǎn 撑着的伞 (the umbrella being carried);
dāpōle de wǎn 打破的碗 (the bowl that was broken);
zǒu jīnlái de rén 走进来的人 (the person who came in);
zhēnglǐ hǎo de shū 整理好的书 (the books that have been arranged);
kān huā de rén 看花的人 (the person looking at the flowers);
mài cài de lǎotà 菜的买老头儿 (the old man selling vegetables);
chī chóngzǐ de zhíwù 吃虫子的植物 (insectivorous plants);
dǎ diànbào de fèiyòng 打电报的费用 (telegraph fee);
dǎsāo wèishēng de gōngzuò rényuán 打扫卫生的工作人员 (sanitation personnel).

de 的 is written separately from a preceding verb or verb phrase even when the head words following is omitted:
mài huā de 卖花的 (flower seller);
dǎ lánqiú de 打篮球的 (basketball player);
kāi chóudūndù de 开绸缎铺的 (silk store proprietor);
mai bōcài, luóbo de 卖白菜萝卜的 (the person who sells turnips and Chinese cabbage);

Chī de, chuān de, yòng de, yàngyàng dōu yǒu. 吃的，穿的，用的，样样都有。 (They have all kinds of food, clothing, and other items of use.);

Wei, lái de shì shuí? 喂，来的是谁? (Who’s there?);

Tīng, chāng de shì jīngjù 《Hóngméijì》. 听，唱的是京剧《红梅记》。 (Listen, it’s the Peking opera “Tale of Red Plum Blossoms” they’re singing.);

A few examples of less typical “verb + de” usages:

Wǒ zuótiān jīn de chéng. 我昨天进的城。
(I went downtown yesterday.);

Xiǎo Wáng jīnnián kǎo de dàxué.
小王今年考的大学。
(Xiao Wang was accepted into college this year.);

Wūzi lǐ de rén, kū de kū, jiào de jiào. 屋子里的人，哭的哭，叫的叫。
(Some of the people in the room were crying, some shouting.);

Huā dōu luò le, xià yǔ xià de. 花儿都落了，下雨下的。
(The flowers have all been beaten off the trees by the rain.);
Yánjīng dōu jìnshí le, kàn shū kàn de.
(‘I’m nearsighted from too much reading.’).
d. Adjective or adjective phrase + de

Attributive constructions of this type are modifying or descriptive in nature. A few examples:

hóng de huā 红的花  (red flowers);
lǜ de yèzi 绿的叶子  (green leaves);
hǎo de bànfǎ 好的办法  (a good solution);
xīn de wèntí 新的问题  (a new problem);
měi lì de chéngshì 美丽的城市  (a beautiful city);
qīn xū de rén 谦虚的人  (a modest person);
xīng fú de shēnghuó 幸福的生活  (a happy life);
 xuè bō de zhī 雪白的纸  (snow-white paper);
wān wān de méimáo 弯弯的眉毛  (arched eyebrows);
 huáng dēng dēng de gǔ zǐ 黄澄澄的谷子  (golden millet);
 zuì gāo de shān fēng 最高的山峰  (highest peak);
 bù qīng jié de shí wù 不清洁的食物  (unsanitary food);
 shí fèn kě xī de shír 十分可惜的事  (a truly unfortunate occurrence);
zhè yàng zhēng sui de lǐ pǐn 这样珍贵的礼品  (such precious gifts);
liǎng jīn zhòng de liyú 两斤重的鲤鱼  (a two-pound carp);
tián ér xiāng de huò shēng tóng 甜而香的花生糖  (sweet and tasty peanut brittle);
guāng róng ér jiān jù de rèn wù 光荣而艰巨的任务  (a glorious but arduous task);
yòu hēi yòu shòu de liǎn 又黑又瘦的脸  (a thin, dark face);
wūguāng—shì sè de huòwù 五光十色的货物 (all sorts of merchandise);
luànqī bā zōu de dōngxi 乱七八糟的东西 (things in a mess, odds and ends).

(See Chapter 10, Idioms and Classical Elements, for the written form of idioms like those used as adjectives in the last two examples.)

de 的 is written separately from a preceding adjective or adjective phrase even when the head word following is omitted:
Zhèr de chèn yī hěn duō, wǒ tiǎole yī jiàn qǐnghóng de.
这儿的衬衣很多，我挑了一件浅红的。
(They have a lot of shirts here; I picked a pink one.;

Wǒ liǎng gè háizi, dà de qī sú, xiǎo de sān sú.
我两个孩子，大的七岁，小的三岁。
(I have two children; the older one is seven years old, the younger three.)

e. Adverb + de:
lílái de xīguàn 历来的习惯 (a tradition of long standing);
zànsī de kùnnán 暂时的困难 (temporary difficulties);
wānyī de jīhuì 万一的机会 (a chance in ten thousand);
yīguàn de bǐdào xuàn 一贯的表现 (a persistent manifestation).

f. Onomatopoeic word + de

In writing, onomatopoeic words are sometimes enclosed in quotation marks for visual effect:
“hu” de yī shēng “忽”的一声 (with a whistling sound);
huahua de lúshuǐ 哗哗的流水 (a burbling stream);
dīdā dīdā de nàozhōng 嘀嗒嘀嗒的闹钟 (a ticking alarm clock).
g. Numeral-measure word phrase + de
yī zhūō de cài 一桌的菜 (a table covered with food);
yī liǎn de hànshuǐ 一脸的汗水 (a face covered with sweat);
yī póipái de lóufāng 一排排的楼房 (row after row of buildings).

h. Prepositional phrase + de:
duí guójì de gōngxiàn 对国家的贡献 (devotion to one’s country);
guānyú dízhèn de zhīshi 关于地震的知识 (knowledge about earthquakes).

i. Subject-predicate construction + de:
wǒ xiǎihuān de xiézi 我喜欢的鞋子 (the shoes I like);
tā fābiǎo de wéngzhōng 他发表的文章 (the article he published);
bìnhào chī de fàn 病号吃的饭 (the patient’s diet);
gōngyè fāzhǎn de sùdù 工业发展的速度 (the speed with which industry develops);
Lǐ Míng jīngxīn shèjì de túān 李明精心设计的图案 (the design Li Ming painstakingly worked up).

de 的 is written separately from a preceding subject-predicate construction even when the head word following is omitted:
Tā shuō de wǒ tīng bu qīngchú. 他说的我听不清楚。 (I couldn’t hear clearly what he was saying.).

de 的 is written together with the component it follows only in the following cases:
yǒude 有的 (some): Yǒude rén tànxī, yǒude rén liúlèi.有的人叹息，有的人流泪。 (Some people were sighing, while others wept.).
shìde 是的 (yes, certainly): Shìde, wǒ jiù qù. 是的，我就去。(Certainly, I’ll go right away.)

shìde 似的 (like, as): Xiàng hóuzi shìde, tiǎolái tiǎoqù. 像猴子似的，跳来跳去。(Jumping around, just like a monkey.)

2) de 地

The principal function of this particle is to link an adverbial modifier to the verb or adjective it modifies. de 地 is always written separately from the elements preceding and following it. The various kinds of de construction are discussed one by one below, according to the nature of the adverbial modifier.

a. Noun or noun phrase + de

This construction is only seldom used:
kēxué de lùnzhèng 科学地论证 (scientifically demonstrate);
bùfēn de jiējué 部分地解决 (partially solve);
xíngshìzhǔyì de kàn wèntí 形式主义地看问题 (look at issues from a formalistic viewpoint);
yī gè zì yī gè zì de niànn 一个字一个字地念 (read word by word);
yī jià yī hù de sōuchá 一家一户地搜查 (conduct a house-by-house search).

b. Verb or verb phrase + de

This construction too is seldom used:
lái huí de běnpǎo 来回地奔跑 (run back and forth);
zhùzhòng de jiǎngjiǎng 着重地讲讲 (discuss emphatically);
bù tíng de liú 不停地流 (flow ceaselessly);
shuō bù chūlái de gāoxìng 说不出来地高兴 (happy though unable to express it in words).
c. Adjective or adjective phrase + de
This is the most common de construction by far:
suiba de kan 隨便地看 (look over casually);
zixi de yanjiu 仔细地研究 (consider carefully);
mohu de tingjian 模糊地听见 (hear indistinctly);
mannan de zou 慢慢地走 (walk slowly);
qingqing de qiao 轻轻地敲 (knock gently);
hen kuai de xuehu 快地学会 (master rapidly);
geng hao de gan 更好地干 (do (something) even better);
bu da yukuai de zou le 不大愉快地走了 (left rather unhappily);
feichang xiangxi de jieshao 非常详细地介绍 (present in great detail).

d. Adverb + de
This form is only seldom used:
gewai de gaoxing 格外地高兴 (especially happy);
feichang de renzhen 非常地认真 (extremely conscientious);
ouron de xiangqi 偶然地想起 (recall by chance);
zaisi de zhufu 再三地嘱咐 (exhort repeatedly);
jingchang de taulun 经常地讨论 (discuss often);
jiannian de liang le 渐渐地凉了 (slowly cooled off).

e. Onomatopoeic word + de
“peng” de xiang le “砰”地响了 (banged);
“hong” de zhakai le “轰”地炸开了 (exploded with a boom);
“gege” de xiao “格格”地笑 (chuckle);
huahua de liu 哗哗地流 (of water) gurgle).

f. Numeral-measure word phrase + de
yi kou yi kou de chi 一口一口地吃 (eat bite by bite);
yī tòng yī tòng de páo 一趟一趟地跑 (make trip after trip);
yī dà piān yī dà piān de kān lèn 一大片一大片地开垦 (open up filed after field for cultivation).

g. Set phrase or idiom + de
jù jīng-huí shén de tíng 聚精会神地听 (listen with rapt attention);
diān sān-dǎo sì de shuō 颠三倒四地说 (talk disconnectedly);
yòu kuì yòu hǎo de wán chéng 又快又好地完成 (complete quickly and well);
yuè lái yuè zhòng de wǎng xià yō 越来越重地往下压 (press down harder and harder).

h Subject-predicate construction + de:
shēng yīn chōng dōu de shuō 声音颤抖地说 (say in a trembling voice);
liǎng shǒu yǒng jīn de bāi 两手用劲地掰 (break apart with the hands, using all one's strength).

3) de 得

The principal function of this particle is to link a verb or adjective with its complement. The complement expresses possibility, degree, or result, and may be composed of a single word or a phrase. The verb or adjective preceding de 得 may only be a single word, never a phrase. de 得 is in principle written separately from the elements preceding and following it. The bu 不 that negates a de 得 expressing possibility is also written separately from the elements around it. A few examples of de 得 (and bu 不) in use:

a. Verb + de:
Complement expressing possibility:
Complement expressing result:

ji de kū 急得哭 (worried to tears);
dā de téng 打得疼 (beaten sore);
xiào de chū yǎnlèi 笑得出眼泪 (laugh so hard one cries);
chuì de wǒ tóu fèiyùn 吹得我头发晕 (blew until I felt dizzy).

Complement expressing degree:
pāo de kuài 跑得快 (run fast);
shuì de xiāng 睡得香 (sleep well);
dāsāo de gāngān-jīngjīng 打扫得干干净净 (clean up spick and span);
xiě de féicháng hǎo 写得非常好 (written extremely well);
kàn de rúlè mí 看得入了迷 (watch entranced);
tīng gùshì tīng de wǒ lián fàn yě wàngle chǐ 听故事听我连饭也忘了吃 (listened so absorbedly to the story that I forgot to eat my meal).

b. Adjective + de

Constructions of this type always express degree:
hǎo de hěn 好得很 (very good);
duō de duō 多得多 (much more);
lěng de yōomíng 冷得要命 (freezing cold);
hei de kònìbùjiàn rén 黑得看不见人 (so dark one can't see the people around one);
méilit de méiyǒu bànfǎ xìngróng 美丽得没有办法形容 (indescribably lovely);
gāoxìng de jīnjīn wòzhù tā de shǒu shuō: "Xièxiè! Xièxiè!" 高兴得紧紧握住他的手说: “谢谢! 谢谢!” (So happy I could only grasp his hand and say, "Thank you! Thank you!").

There are two main situations in which de 得 should be written as one unit with the component that precedes or follows it. Let us take a look at these:

(1) de 得 sometimes joins together with the verb that precedes it to form a single word. Sometimes a bu 不 is interposed between the verb and de 得 to indicate negation. In either case, all elements are written as one unit. The most common such words are listed below:

- dōngde 懂得 (to understand);
- jìde 记得 (to remember);
- jiànde 见得 (to seem);
- juède 觉得 (to feel);
- kuìde 亏得 (fortunately);
- lǎide 来得 (to be competent (to do something));
- lǐode 了得 (terrible);
- miàode 免得 (in order to avoid);
- rènde 认得 (to recognize);
- shède 舍得 (not to grudge, willing to go without);
- shídé 使得 (to cause);
- xiǎndé 显得 (to seem, appear);
- xiǎode 晓得 (to know);

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zhìdě 值得 （to be worth）;
baǐbùdè 巴不得 （to be very eager to）;
guàibùdè 怪不得 （no wonder）;
láiibùdè 来不得 （impermissible）;
lìdōbùdè 了不得 （terrific）;
mìānbùdè 免不得 （unavoidable）;
shèbùdè 舍不得 （to be reluctant）;
shìbùdè 使不得 （cannot）;
yuànbùdè 怨不得 （no wonder）．

(2) In certain trisyllabic verb-complement constructions in which de 得 （or the negative marker bu 不） forms the middle syllable, the meaning of the complement has altered and the whole has come to express a single concept. In this case, all three syllables should be written as one unit. Some of the more common examples of this construction are listed below:

ji：lǎideji 来得及 （there’s still time；to be in time）;
làibúji 来不及 （there’s no time；to be too late）;
kāi：chǐdekāi 吃得开 （to be popular）;
chībukāi 吃不开 （be unpopular）;
qǐ：duídeqǐ 对得起 （not let somebody down）;
duíbúqǐ 对不起 （let somebody down；also，“excuse me”）;
qu：guòdeqù 过得去 （feel at ease）;
guòbùqù 过不去 （feel sorry, apologetic）;
shàng：gǎndeshàng 赶得上 （keep up with, catch up with）;
gǎnbushàng 赶不上 （fall behind）;
xīāo：chǐdēxiāo 吃得消 （be able to bear）;
chíbùxiāo 吃不消 （be unable to bear）;
zháo：shùdezháo 宿得着 （be considered as）；

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4) zhī 之

This structural particle is a holdover from classical Chinese. It is close in meaning and usage to de 的, and in most situations de 的 is used in preference to zhī 之. zhī 之 is used only in a limited number of environments. It is usually written separately from the words around it, as:

- shòonian zhī jī少年之家 (Children's Center);
- wújū zhī bāo 无价之宝 (a priceless treasure);
- qiān lǐ zhī wài 千里之外 (1,000 里 away; very far away);
- chǐzhī zhī xīn 赤子之心 (the heart of a newborn child—utter innocence);
- yìliào zhī zhōng 意料之中 (as might be expected);
- xīnhūn zhī yè 新婚之夜 (wedding night);
- Huǒyào shì Zhōngguó gǔdài sì dà fāmìng zhī yì. 火药是中国古代四大发明之一。 (Gunpowder was one of the four great inventions of ancient China.)

zhī 之 is written as part of a larger unit in the compound fēnzhī 分之 (divided by) used in expressing fractions. (For more details, see Chapter 4, Section 3.)

5) suǒ 所

This particle is another holdover from classical Chinese. It is most commonly seen in written language, where it is often followed by a verb to form a verb construction. suǒ 所 is usually written separately from the verb that follows it, as:

- dàojiā suǒ tí de wèntí 大家所提的问题 (the questions that ev-
9.2 Tense-Marking Particles

Tense-marking particles have already been discussed in some detail in Chapter 5, Verbs. It was noted there that the tense markers zhe 着 (indicating an action in progress) and guo 过 (indicating a past experience) are always written as a single unit with the verb they follow. The particle le 了 (indicating a completed action) is sometimes, but not always, written as a single unit with its verb. This is because le 了, unlike zhe 着 and guo 过, may be separated from its verb by other elements; and also because le 了 itself can act as a mood particle as well as a tense particle. (For details on le 了 as a mood particle, see Section 3 of chapter.)

This section is devoted to a discussion of orthography specifically as it relates to the tense particle le 了. Three rules are laid out to help the student master the written forms of this parti-
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