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Chapter 2

The status of *de*

2.1 A brief history of *de*

It has been observed that *de* was originally used as an independent verb meaning “to obtain, gain” in the oracle-bone inscriptions (Chou 1953). Between 500 B.C. and 200 A.D., the verb *de* acquired another sense meaning “to be possible” and functioned as a modal in the sequence of “*de* V” (cf. Chou 1953; Yue 1984; Sun 1996). From the Han Dynasty (202 B.C.-220 A.D.), *de* started to appear after a verb in the form of V *de*, either as a verb or as a modal (Ohta 1958; Yue 1984). According to Yue (1984), *de* didn’t start to appear in V-*de*-R until in the Northern and Southern Dynasties (420-589) and V-*de*-R/S was widely used in the middle of the Tang Dynasty (618-907). With the decline of V-*de* in the years following the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368), V-*de*-A/R has replaced V-*de* as the dominant use among various constructions with *de* and became the most common usage of *de* in Modern Chinese. For the detailed route of grammaticalization on *de*, please refer to Sun (1996: Ch.5). In Modern Chinese, almost all the usages of *de* can still be found (cf. Tang 1992; Sun 1996; T. Wu 2004; etc.). They only differ in frequencies.

Yue (1984) and Sun (1996) assume that the *de* in the potential *de* construction, resultative V-*de* construction and descriptive V-*de* construction all originated from the verb *de* ‘obtain’, either directly or indirectly. It sounds reasonable to take potential *de* as a product of grammaticalization of verb *de*. However, there may be some problems to apply the same mechanism into

resultative *V-de* construction and descriptive *V-de* construction. This may be seen from dialects. Tang (1992) makes a comparative study between Mandarin and Southern Min. He postulates that the counterpart of *de* in resultative *V-de* construction is *kah* 甲 in Southern Min (see also Wang 2010). The counterpart of *de* in descriptive *V-de* construction is *liau* 了 or *tioh* 著 in Southern Min. The counterpart of *de* in the potential *de* construction in Southern Min is *e* 會. Meanwhile, Li (1990: 63, fn 1) and Cheng (2007: 166) point out the resultative *de* and manner *de* are different, as this can be clearly seen in some related dialects of Chinese, such as Cantonese. The counterpart of *de* in the resultative clause in Cantonese is the verb *dou* ‘arrive’, while the counterpart of *de* in the manner adverbial in Cantonese is *dak*.

2.2 Clitic or affix?

In the literature, the status of *de* in *de*-related constructions is still controversial (cf. Huang 1988: 275). There is often a dispute on whether *de* is a clitic or affix.¹ Following Chao (1968), C.-R. Huang (1987) takes the potential *de* in *kan de dong* ‘be able to understand’ as a verbal affix. C.-R. Huang & Mangione (1985), C.-R. Huang (1987: 44) take *de* in “extent adverbials” (resultative *V-de*) sentences like *ta kan de yanjing hen lei* ‘His eyes got tired as a result of reading’ as a verbal phrase clitic. Tang (1990) takes *de* in descriptive and resultative sentences as a clitic to be attached to a verb at the PF. Applying the six criteria to differentiate clitics from affixes in Zwicky and Pullum (1983: 503-504), Dai

1 Zwicky & Pullum (1983) presents several arguments to distinguish clitics from (inflectional) affixes. One of them is that clitics can attach to words of virtually any category, as the ‘s in (i). However, (inflectional) affixes are very selective on their stems. For instance, the plural *-s* attaches only to noun stems and the past *-ed* only to verb stems.

- (i) a. She’s gone. [pronoun]
- b. The person I was talking to’s going to be angry with me. [preposition]
- c. The ball you hit’s just broken my dining room window. [verb]
- d. Any answer not entirely right’s going to be marked as an error. [adjective]
- e. The drive home tonight’s been really easy. [adverb]

(1992a: 172-182) shows that three of them are in favor of analyzing *de* in resultative and descriptive *V-de* sentences as an affix rather than a clitic.¹ The three criteria are the degree of selection between the dependent morpheme and the word to which it attaches, the existence of arbitrary lexical gaps, and the possibility of syntactic operations affecting the combinations. The first criterion is exemplified in (1), in which *de* in resultative and descriptive *V-de* sentences can be only hosted by a verb or adjective, but not a noun. Actually, the hosts for the *de* in resultative and descriptive *V-de* sentences are more restricted than we thought. Auxiliary verbs, such as *neng* ‘can’, *yinggai* ‘should’, *keyi* ‘may’, could not host *de*. However, a clitic is not so selective on its host, such as attributive marker *de*, which may be attached to a verb, adjective or noun, as shown in (2). In this line, *de* behaves like an affix in its high degree of selection for hosts (Dai 1992a: 179).

(1) a. 看得快

kan -*de* kuai
read DE fast
‘read fast’

b. 红得耀眼

hong -*de* yaoyan
red DE strike.eyes
‘too bright for eyes’

c. *雨得大

*yu -*de* da
rain DE big

(Dai 1992a: 178-179)

(2) a. chi de

eat *de*
‘the things to eat’

b. hong de

1 In Dai (1992a, 1992b), descriptive *V-de* sentences are taken as a kind of resultative *V-de* sentences.

- red *de*
 ‘red’
- c. shu *de* (fengmian)
 book *de* (cover)
 ‘(the cover) of the book’

The second criterion is exemplified by those verbs which can take complement clauses, such as *xiang* ‘think’ and *yiwei* ‘presume’. Some of them show arbitrary gaps and cannot take V-*de* form (Dai 1992a: 181), as in (3). “If *de* is a verbal affix, arbitrary gaps should come as no surprise, since the combination of the stem-affix is largely morphological and/or lexical in nature.” (Dai 1992a: 180)

- (3) a. 他想钱很容易赚到, 而且想得十分天真。
 ta xiang qian hen rongyi zhuan-dao, erqie xiang -*de* shifen tianzhen.
 he think money very easy earn and think-DE very naive
 ‘He thought that money was easy to earn, and he thought so naively.’
- b. *他以为钱很容易赚到, 而且以为得十分天真。
 *ta yiwei qian hen rongyi zhuan-dao,
 he presume money very easy earn
 erqie yiwei -*de* shifen tianzhen.
 and presume DE very naive
 ‘He presumed/opined that money was easy to earn, and he did so naively.’
 (Dai 1992a: 180-181)

The third criterion is exemplified in (4), in which V-*de* can undergo movement. On the contrary, this is impossible for clitics, as shown in (5). If sentential particles *le*, *ma*, *ba*, etc. are viewed as clitics (Chao 1968: 149), *ma* can be cliticized onto either *ta-men* ‘them’ as in (5a) or *xihuan* ‘like’ as in (5b). However, *ta-men=ma* could not undergo movement, as shown in (5c).

- (4) a. 这个试验, 连最有耐心的人都做得不耐烦了。
 zhe ge shiyan lian zui you naixin de ren dou zuo-*de*

this CL experiment even most have patience *de* persons all do DE
bu naifan le.

not patient SFP

‘Doing this experiment even caused the most patient persons to be impatient.’

b. 这个试验，做得连最有耐心的人都不耐烦了。

zhe ge shiyan, zuo-*de* lian zui you naixin de ren dou
this CL experiment do DE even most have patience *de* persons all
bu naifan le.

not patient SFP

c. 连最有耐心的人，这个试验做得都不耐烦了。

lian zui you naixin de ren, zhe ge shiyan zuo-*de* dou
even most have patience *de* person this CL experiment do DE all
bu naifan le.

not patient SFP

(Dai 1992a: 181-182)

(5) a. 你喜欢他们吗?

ni xihuan ta-men=ma?

you like he-PL SFP

‘Do you like them?’

b. 他们你喜欢吗?

ta-men ni xihuan=ma?

he-PL you like SFP

c. *他们吗你喜欢?

*ta-men=ma ni xihuan?

he-PL SFP you like

(Dai 1992a: 178)

Following Dai (1992a), Shen & Ting (2008) add another three more arguments in support of analyzing *de* as an affix rather than a clitic. One of the arguments is that “clitics attach outside affixes” (Shen & Ting 2008: 6). However,

this is not the case for *de*, if *de* is taken as a clitic and *le*, *zhe*, *guo* are taken as inflectional morphemes (cf. Dai 1992a, 1992b), as in (6).

- (6) **le/zhe/guo* *de*
 Perf/Dur/Exp DE

[Shen & Ting 2008: (20)]

If *de* in resultative and descriptive *de* constructions is an affix, is it an inflectional morpheme or derivational one? As pointed out by Dai (1992b), it is not easy to distinguish between them. Following Anderson (1982: 587), Dai (1992a, 1992b) assumes that inflection morphemes are those morphemes which are relevant to syntax, in contrast to derivational morphemes which are of lexical function. Dai (1992a: 182-188) proposes that resultative and descriptive *de* is an inflectional morpheme, which is like three other inflectional morphemes, such as aspect markers *-le*, *-zhuo*, *-guo*. These inflectional morphemes attach to verbs only, but not to an object NP. In line with Aronoff & Fudeman (2005: 160-162), Shen & Dai (2007: 7-8) provide some more evidence to show that *de* in descriptive and resultative sentences is an inflectional affix. It is illuminative to take resultative *de* as an inflectional morpheme. However, there are still some problems unsolved. The first one is that, an inflectional morpheme usually carries a certain meaning, for instance, *-ed* in English denotes past tense. What does *de* in resultative and descriptive *V-de* sentences denote if it is an inflectional morpheme? Dai (1992a) has made no clear answer to this. Meanwhile, Dai makes no explanation on the syntactic roles of inflectional *de*, though the key defining property of inflection morphemes is its syntactic effects (Dai 1992a). If the *de* in descriptive and resultative *V-de* sentences is taken as an inflectional morpheme, how about the *de* in potential sentences? Is it an infix inserted between V and R (Chao 1968; Zhu 1982; C.-R. Huang 1987; Tsai 2001; etc.)? These questions are not touched upon in Dai (1992a, 1992b), as he mainly focuses on descriptive and resultative *V-de* sentences. In this book, we will follow Chao (1968), Zhu (1982), Huang (1988), Dai (1992a, 1992b), He (1996, 2011), and Shen & Ting (2008) to take *de* in

descriptive and resultative sentences as an affix. Meanwhile, we would like to extend this analysis into potential *de* sentences. Following Tsai (2001), Lin (2004), T. Wu (2004), Huang (2006, 2010, 2015), Tang (2010), Q. Wang (2013), and some others, we assume *de* in potential, resultative and descriptive sentences is used as a functional head, which can be realized as POTENTIAL, CAUSE, BECOME or BE. This proposal will help to clarify the syntactic status of *de* which has been left by the inflectional morpheme analysis of *de* in Dai (1992a, 1992b). Thinking along this line, *de* should be an inflectional morpheme in all three constructions, as proposed by Dai (1992a, 1992b) and Shen & Ting (2008). In spite of this, under the framework of DM, it is enough to take *de* as an affix, whether it is inflectional or derivational. What *de* needs is a verbal or adjective host to attach to, so as to meet its own morphological needs.

2.3 At which level does *de*-affixation operate?

In §2.2, we review the status of *de*, mainly discussing the issue whether *de* is an affix or clitic. Actually, the distinction is impossible without considering at which level *V-de* is formed. Is *de* inserted at the phonological level as a dummy element, or does it operate at the syntactic level as a functional head or does it work at the post-syntactic level or a pre-syntactic level? In this subsection, we will have a brief review on these questions.

In analyzing descriptive *V-de* sentences, A. Li (1990) adopts Huang's (1982) analysis to assume that *de* is inserted at the phonological level. In analyzing resultative *V-de* construction, Sybesma (1992, 1999) takes *de* as a dummy head of Ext(ent)P (see also Cheng & Yang 2017), which is inserted when there is no head movement involved, as depicted in (7c). In (7a), if *shi-le* moves to Ext, it will form (7b). However, if there is no movement, a dummy *de* will be inserted into Ext⁰, forming (7b). This dummy analysis of *de* has received some criticism, as discussed in Z. Wu (2004: 173-180), Li (2005), and Shen & Ting (2008: 2-4). One of the problems of the movement analysis concerns the behavior of durational adverbials (cf. Li 2005). It is observed that duration adverbials can

occur freely inside the embedded clause of the V-*de* construction, as in (8a), but are completely unacceptable with resultative compounds, as in (8b). If such movement is really involved in the derivation of (7b), it's hard to explain why there is such an asymmetry for duration adverbials.

(7) a. Zhangsan [_{VP} ku [_{ExtP} Ext⁰ [_{SC} shoujuan shi-le]]]

Zhangsan cry handkerchief wet-LE

b. 张三哭湿了手绢。

Zhangsan ku-shi-le shoujuan.

Zhangsan cry-wet-LE handkerchief

c. 张三哭得手绢湿了。

Zhangsan ku-*de* shoujuan shi-le.

Zhangsan cry-DE handkerchief wet-LE

'Zhang San cried the handkerchief wet'

(Sybesma 1999: 1, 19)

(8) a. 李逵累得哭了两天。

Likui lei-*de* [ku-le liang-tian].

Likui tired-DE cry Perf two-day

'Likui was so tired he wept for two days.'

b. 李逵累哭了 (*两天)。

Likui lei- ku- le (*liang-tian).

Likui tired cry Perf two-day

'Likui was so tired he wept for two days.'

(Li 2005: 58)

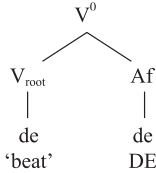
Since there are some problems taking *de* as an element inserted at the phonological level, is it possible that *de* operates at the pre-syntactic level? Shen & Ting (2008) take such a view and assume that V-*de* is formed in the lexicon. They have analyzed *da-de* in (9a) as (9b), where the root *da* merges with an affix *de* to form a V⁰ *da-de*.

(9) a. 张三打得李四头破血流。

Zhangsan da -*de* Lisi toupoxueliu.

Zhangsan beat DE Lisi head-break-blood-flow
‘Zhangsan beat Lisi badly.’

b.



(Shen & Ting 2008: 44)

The lexical analysis of *V-de* will encounter some problems (cf. Wang 2010: 67-73). It will not only enlarge the lexicon (cf. Gao 2011) but also fail to explain the functional meaning of *de* involved in *V-de* constructions. As suggested in He (2003), J. Huang (2006, 2015), *de* in phrasal resultatives can play a certain role in making causativization possible for an unergative verb in Chinese. In Chapter 4 and 5, we will provide some evidence from the modification of manner adverbials and the cancellability of *V*'s to argue that the *V*'s in descriptive and resultative *V-de* constructions are not main verbs of the constructions but adjuncts to be merged after syntax. If this assumption is on the right tract, it accordingly denies the possibility that *de* can be a phonologically inserted element or *V-de* can be formed at a pre-syntactic level.

If *de* in resultative (and/or descriptive) sentences does not operate at a pre-syntactic level, nor is it inserted at the phonological level, the only possibility left is that it is used as a functional head at the syntactic level.¹ Actually, many

1 There is another possibility, that is, *de* may have a certain function in prosody, such as the examples in (i)-(ii). It may be due to prosodic reasons or it may be related to the idiomatic meaning of *de-X*, such as *de-duo* 得多, *de-hen* 得很, *de-huang* 得慌, in which *de* roughly means “very”. These idiosyncratic meanings can also be dealt with at the phonological level under the framework of DM (cf. Marantz 1997).

- (i) *简单多, 简单得多, 简单多了
*jiandan duo, jiandan de duo, jiandan duo le
simple much simple DE much simple much Inch
‘much simpler’
- (ii) *高兴很, 高兴得很, *高兴很了
*gaoxing hen, gaoxing-de hen, *gaoxing hen le
happy very happy DE very happy very Inch
Intended meaning: ‘much happier’

scholars have pursued this possibility. In the literature, *de* has been analyzed as a Comp in Huang (1982, 1988), Cheng (1986), Tang (1990), Si (2009), Wang (2010), Lü (2013), etc., though the detailed analyses of the formation of *V-de* are slightly different. For instance, J. Tang (1990) assumes that *de* is attached to verbs at PF under adjacency in descriptive and resultative expressions. S. Tang (1997) and Yang (1998) take *de* as an unspecified functional head. Sybesma (1999) and Lin (2001) take *de* as an extent marker. In analyzing causative construction in Chinese, *de* is taken as an instantiation of BEC(OME) in Xiong (2004, 2011, 2013). In analyzing resultative constructions in Chinese, *de* is realized as BEC or CAUSE in J. Huang (2006). Two types of *de* are distinguished in Tang (2010: 124), stative *de* and dynamic *de*. According to him, “V+*de*_{stative}” is selected by light verb BE and “V+*de*_{dynamic}” by BEC. The *de* in descriptive sentences in Chinese is taken as a gerund head in Tsai (2012). Following J. Huang (2006), Q. Wang (2013) assumes that *de* is a light verb realized as CAUSE. To take *de* as a functional head at the syntactic level is rather appealing, whether it is realized as Comp, BEC or CAUSE. However, there is an issue less discussed in the literature, which is related to the status of V in descriptive and resultative *V-de* constructions. To the best of knowledge, except in Huang (2006, 2015), Q. Wang (2013), and C. Wang (2014a, 2021, 2024), the V in descriptive and resultative *V-de* constructions is mainly taken as a verb at the syntactic level. However, this is contradictory to our empirical observation on the status of V from the perspectives of manner adverbial modification, presupposition tests and positive imperative form, etc. In the following chapters, we will try to make some exploration on these interesting issues.

2.4 *De* and A-not-A

In discussing the internal structure of (descriptive and resultative) sentences like (10) and (11), Huang (1988) argues against taking the second verb *kuai* ‘fast’ and *lei* ‘tired’ as main predicates (cf. Chao 1968) and proposes to take the first verb *pao* ‘run’ and *tiao* ‘jump’ as main predicates of the sentences.

(10) 我跑得很快。

wo pao-*de* hen kuai.
I run DE very fast
'I run very fast.'

[Huang 1988: 274 (1)]

(11) 他们跳得很累。

tamen tiao-*de* hen lei.
they jump DE very tired
'They jumped till they got very tired.'

[Huang 1988: 274 (2)]

There are several arguments arguing against taking the first verb in (10) and (11) as a main predicate. They are related to A-not-A questions, *le*-suffixation and binding condition C. These three major arguments are reviewed one by one in Huang (1988) and it is shown that these arguments are not cogent. In the following, we will mainly review Huang's analysis on A-not-A as it matters much with *de*.

According to Chao (1968), it is usually the main verb of a sentence which takes the A-not-A form in A-not-A questions, as shown in (12). However, in descriptive and resultative *V-de* sentences, it is the second verb/adjective, not the first verb, that undergoes A-not-A questions, as shown in (13) and (14). In this sense, the second verb/adjective should be taken as the main predicate of the sentence (cf. Chao 1968). Huang (1988) argues instead that it is a false generalization that "the verb that takes the A-not-A form in an A-not-A question is the main verb of that question". One counterexample to this generalization is (15).

(12) 你跑不跑?

ni pao- bu- pao?
you run not run
'Will you run or not?'

(13) a. 他们跑得快不快?

tamen pao-*de* kuai-bu-kuai?
 they run DE fast-not-fast
 'Do they run fast?'

b. *他们跑不跑得快?

*tamen pao-bu-pao-*de* kuai?
 they run-not-run DE fast

[Huang 1988: 277 (5)]

(14) a. 你跑得累不累?

ni pao-*de* lei-bu-lei?
 you run DE tired-not-tired
 'Are you tired from running?'

b. *你跑不跑得累?

*ni pao-bu-pao -*de* lei?
 you run-not-run DE tired

[Huang 1988: 277 (6)]

(15) 你认为 [他们会不会来] ?

ni renwei [tamen hui-bu-hui lai]?
 you think they will-not-will come
 'Do you think that they will come or do you think they won't?'

[Huang 1988: 279 (14)]

In (15), it is the auxiliary verb *hui* 'will' in the embedded clause which takes the A-not-A form, but not the verb *lai* 'come'. Meanwhile, as suggested by Jane Tang in T. Tang (1999: 114, fn 15), frequency adverbs sometimes may form an A-not-A question, as in (16).

(16) 你常不常看电影?

ni chang-bu-chang kan dianying?
 you often-not-often watch film
 'Do you often watch films?'

Interestingly, in potential V-de-R construction in Chinese, neither V nor R can undergo A-not-A formation, as shown in (17a) and (17b). Instead, it forms

a question in the form of “V-*de*-R V-*bu*-R”, as in (17c) (cf. Zhu 1982; Williams 2014).

(17) a. *你看不看得懂这本书?

*ni kan bu kan -*de* -dong zhe ben shu?
you read not read DE understand this CL book
Intended meaning: ‘Can you understand this book (from reading)?’

b. *你看得懂不懂这本书?

*ni kan -*de*-dong bu- dong zhe ben shu?
you read DE understand not understand this CL book
Intended meaning: ‘Can you understand this book (from reading)?’

c. 你看得懂看不懂这本书?

ni kan -*de*-dong kan -*bu*- dong zhe ben shu?
you read DE understand read not understand this CL book
‘Can you understand this book (from reading)?’

Interestingly, we can use *shi-bu-shi* ‘be-not-be’ or *you-mei-you* ‘have-not-have’ to form a A-not-A question in descriptive, resultative and potential sentences, as shown in (18).¹

(18) a. 他是不是跑得很快?

ta shi-bu-shi pao -*de* hen kuai?
he be-not-be run DE very fast
‘Is he very fast in running?’

b. 他有没有跑得很累?

ta you-mei-you pao -*de* hen lei?
he have-not-have run DE very tired

1 Compared with descriptive and resultative V-*de* constructions, potential V-*de*-R is a bit restricted in undergoing *shi-bu-shi* or *you-mei-you* form, as in (i). It seems V-*bu*-R is more flexible in undergoing *shi-bu-shi* or *you-mei-you* form. The reason for this is still not clear.

(i) ?*他是不是看得懂这本书?

?*ta shi-bu-shi kan -*de*-dong zhe ben shu?
he be-not-be read DE understand this CL book
Intended meaning: ‘He can understand this book (from reading), can’t he?’

‘Did he get tired from running?’

c. 他是不是看不懂那本书?

ta shi-bu-shi kan-*bu*- dong na ben shu?

he be-not-be run BU understand that CL book

‘Is it the case that he couldn’t understand that book (from reading)?’

Based on the above discussion, we know that we could not judge whether an element in *de*-related constructions is a main predicate or not from the A-not-A questions. As proposed by Huang (2006, 2010, 2015), maybe it is the *de*, not the V or R, that is the “main predicate” of the resultative V-*de* construction. In this book, we will explore such a possibility and extend it into the descriptive V-*de* construction and potential *de* construction to give a unified analysis of *de*-related constructions in Chinese.

2.5 Summary

In this chapter, we have reviewed some issues related to *de* in potential, resultative and descriptive sentences. First we gave a brief introduction to the historical development of *de* in Chinese. Then we reviewed the debate on whether *de* in resultative and descriptive V-*de* sentences is an affix or a clitic. After that, we discussed the possible levels (i.e. pre-syntactic level, post-syntactic level and syntactic level) at which V-*de* may be formed. After this discussion, we come to review the A-not-A question in *de*-related constructions.