

Master the Uses of 了(le)

<https://youtu.be/hEe6J5sc0KI>

Part 1

了 As a set structure

“了” can go with some words in set structures. In this case, “了” is usually placed at the end of a sentence to indicate an affirmative and emphasizing tone.

kuài yào / kuài / yào le

1. 快要 / 快/ 要 + verb + 了 be about to...

Examples:

Tāmen kuài yào jié hūn le.

(1) 他们 快要结婚了。

They are about to get married.

Wǒ kuài yào chū guó le.

(2) 我 快要出国了。

I'm about to go abroad.

tài le

2. 太 + Adj./ V. + 了 too...

Examples:

Lǎobǎn tài máng le.

(1) 老板 太忙了。

The boss is too busy.

Zhège nǚ hái tài piàoliang le.

(2) 这个女孩 太漂亮了。

This girl is so pretty.

jí le

3. Adj.+ 极了 extremely...

Examples:

Zhège zhǔyi hǎo jí le!

(1) 这个 主意 好 极了!

This idea is really great (excellent)!

Zhè zhī xiǎo bái gǒu kě'ài jí le!

(2) 这 只 小 白 狗 可爱 极了!

This little white dog is so cute!

sǐ le

4. Adj.+ 死了 extremely...

Examples:

Wǒ zuìjìn lèi sǐ le .

(1) 我 最近 累 死了。

I have been so tired lately.

Wàimiàn chǎo sǐ le.

(2) 外面 吵 死了。

It is so loud outside.

Set Structures with “了”

| Num. | Pattern | level | meaning | examples |
|------|---------------------------------------|-------|---|--|
| 1 | 太+ Adj. / V. +了 tài+ Adj. / V. +le | HSK1 | too... | 现在 太 晚了。 Xiànzài tài wǎn le. Now it's too late. |
| 2 | Sub.+V.+O.+了吗? topic(+S)+V+了吗? | HSK1 | asking questions about completed actions. | 你昨天给我打电话 了吗? Nǐ zuótiān gěi wǒ dǎ diànhuà le ma? Did you call me yesterday? 晚饭你吃 了吗? Wǎnfàn nǐ chī le ma? Did you eat dinner? |

| | | | | |
|----|---|------|---------------------------------------|--|
| 3 | Sub. + time+就+V.+了 Sub. + time+jiù+V.+le | HSK2 | as early as | 我昨晚八点半就睡觉了。 Wǒ zuówǎn bā diǎn bàn jiù shuǐjiào le. I went to bed at eight thirty last night. |
| 4 | 不+V. phrase+了 bù+V. phrase+le | HSK2 | not anymore | 我不想吃了。 Wǒ bù xiǎng chī le. I don't want to eat anymore. |
| 5 | Sub.+V.+完了 Sub.+V.+ wán le Sub.+V.+完+Obj.+了 Sub.+V.+wán+Obj.+ le | HSK2 | result complement for finishing | 我说完了。 Wǒ shuō wán le. I am finished talking. 老板开完会了。 Lǎobǎn kāi wán huì le. The boss finished having the meeting. |
| 6 | 都+time+了 dōu +time+le | HSK2 | already | 都九点了，快点起床！ Dōu jiǔ diǎn le, kuài diǎn qǐchuáng! It's already nine o'clock. Get out of bed! |
| 7 | 已经+V./Adj.+了 yǐjīng+V./Adj.+le | HSK2 | already | 我已经有男朋友了。 Wǒ yǐjīng yǒu nán péngyou le. I already have a boyfriend. 爸爸妈妈已经老了。 Bàba māma yǐjīng lǎo le. Mom and dad are already old. |
| 9 | 快/要/快要/就要+V.+了 kuài/yào/kuàiyào/jiùyào+V.+le | HSK2 | be about to... | 我们快到了。 Wǒmen kuài dào le. We're almost there. |
| 10 | Noun+不见了 noun+ bújiànle | HSK3 | to be lost; to be gone | 我的手机不见了。 Wǒde shǒujī bújiànle. My cellphone was lost. |
| 11 | 没+N. phrase+了 méi+N. phrase+le | HSK3 | no longer | 手机没电了。 Shǒujī méi diàn le. My cell phone has run out of power. |
| 12 | (Sub.)+又+V.+了 (Sub.)+ yòu+V.+le | HSK3 | sth. happens again | 你又迟到了。 Nǐ yòu chídào le. You're late again. |

| | | | | |
|----|---|------|-----------------------|--|
| 13 | Sub.+终于.....了 Sub.+zhōngyú.....le | HSK3 | finally | 你们终于明白了。 Nǐmen zhōngyú míngbai le. You've finally understood. |
| 14 | Sub. +越来越+Adj/V.+了 Sub.+yuèláiyuè+Adj/V.+le | HSK3 | more and more | 天气越来越冷了。 Tiānqì yuèláiyuè lěng le. The weather is getting colder and colder. 我越来越理解我的父母了。 Wǒ yuèláiyuè lǐjiě wǒ de fùmǔ le. I understand my parents more and more. |
| 15 | Adj.+极了 Adj.+jíle | HSK3 | extremely... | 味道好极了! Wèidào hǎo jíle! The taste is perfect! |
| 16 | Adj.+死了 Adj.+sǐle | HSK4 | extremely... | 我饿死了。 Wǒ è sǐ le! I'm starving! |
| 17 | 可+Adj.+了 kě++Adj.+le | HSK4 | really... | 这个游戏可好玩了! 推荐给你。 Zhège yóuxì kě hǎowánle! Tuījiàn gěi nǐ. This game is really fun! You can give it a try. |
| 18 | 该+V.+了 gāi+V.+le | HSK4 | It is time to do sth. | 我们该去机场了。 Wǒmen gāi qù jīchǎng le. We have to go to the airport. |
| 19 | 够+V./Adj.+了 gòu++V./Adj.+le | HSK4 | enough | 我们买了很多菜, 够吃了。 Wǒmen mǎi le hěn duō cài, gòu chī le. We bought a lot of food. It's enough. 别抱怨了, 你够幸运了。 Bié bàoYuàn le, nǐ gòu xìngyùn le. Stop complaining. You've been so lucky. |
| 20 | Sub.+再也不+V.+O....了 Sub.+zài yě bù+V.+O....le | HSK5 | never again | 我们再也不相信你了! Wǒmen zài yě bú huì xiāngxìn nǐ le! We're not going to believe you ever again! |

Part 2

了 Change of state

“了” is used at the end of a sentence to indicate that a situation changes or a new situation occurs.

Structure: Noun /Adj. / Sentence + 了.

Examples:

Wàimiàn xià yǔ le.

(1) 外面 下雨 了。

It's raining outside.

(It wasn't before, but that is the situation now.)

Tā huì shuō Hànyǔ le.

(2) 她 会 说 汉语 了。

She can speak Chinese now.

(She couldn't speak Chinese before, but now she can.)

Wǒ bù xǐhuan chī píngguǒ le.

(3) 我 不 喜欢 吃 苹果 了。

I don't like to eat apples anymore.

(I liked to eat apples before, but now I don't like anymore.)

Wǒ pàng le .

(4) 我 胖 了。

I gained weight.

Wǒ jié hūn le.

(5) 我 结 婚 了。

I got married.

Wǒ shì yí ge hái zǐ de mā ma le.

(6) 我 是 一 个 孩 子 的 妈 妈 了。

I became a mother.

Part 3

了 Completed action

The structure “Verb +了” indicates that an action is completed or realized. The action can be not only in the past, but also in the present and in the future.

Structure: verb+了+.....

Examples:

Wǒ zuótiān mǎile yì běn shū.

(1) 我 昨天 买了 一 本 书。

I bought a book yesterday.

Tā zài wǒ jiā zhùle sān tiān.

(2) 他 在 我 家 住 了 三 天。

He stayed in my house for three days.

Tā láile wǒ huì gàosu nǐ.

(3) 他 来 了 我 会 告 诉 你。

I'll tell you when he is here.

Note:

1. When an action is not completed or did not happen, we should use “没+verb” and drop “了”.

Examples:

Zuótiān wǒ qùle túshūguǎn.

(1) 昨天 我 去 了 图书馆。

I went to the library yesterday.

↓ negative form

Zuótiān wǒ méi qù túshūguǎn.

昨天 我 没 去 图书馆。

I didn't go to the library yesterday.

Wǒ gānggāng kànjiànle Wáng lǎoshī.

(2) 我 刚刚 看见了 王 老师。

I just saw Teacher Wang.

↓ negative form

Wǒ gānggāng méi kànjiàn Wáng lǎoshī.

我 刚刚 没 看见 王 老师。

I didn't see teacher Wang.

Wǒ mǎile yí jiàn yīfu.

(3) 我 买了 一件 衣服。

I bought a piece of clothing.

↓ negative form

Wǒ méi mǎi yīfu.

我 没 买 衣服。

I did not buy any clothes.

2. “了” cannot be used with multiple, repetitive and regular actions. Many sentences have such words including 经常 [jīngcháng] often, 一直 [yìzhí] always, 每天 [měi tiān] every day etc.

Examples:

(1) I used to go to the library.

Wǒ yǐqián jīngcháng qù túshūguǎn.

我 以前 经常 去 图书馆。√

Wǒ yǐqián jīngcháng qùle túshūguǎn.

*我 以前 经常 去了 图书馆。×

(2) I was studying Chinese in China the whole year last year.

Qùnián wǒ yìzhí zài Zhōngguó xuéxí Hànyǔ.

去年 我 一直 在 中国 学习 汉语。√

Qùnián wǒ yìzhí zài Zhōngguó xuéxí le Hànyǔ.

*去年 我 一直 在 中国 学习了 汉语。×

(3) I take the subway to go to school every day.

Wǒ měi tiān zuò dìtiě qù xuéxiào.

我 每 天 坐 地铁 去 学校。√

Wǒ měi tiān zuò dìtiě qù le xuéxiào.

*我 每 天 坐 地铁 去了 学校。×

3. Not all verbs can have a “了” after them. “了” cannot be used after verbs to express your thoughts or feelings, for example: 喜欢[xǐhuan]like, 爱[ài]love, 打算[dǎsuàn]plan to, 希望[xīwàng]hope etc.

Examples:

(1) I plan to go on a trip over the weekend.

Wǒ dǎsuàn zhōumò qù lǚxíng.

我 打算 周末 去 旅行。√

Wǒ dǎsuàn le zhōumò qù lǚxíng.

*我 打算 了 周末 去 旅行。×

(2) I liked to play computer games when I was in university.

Shàng dàxué shí, wǒ xǐhuan dǎ yóuxì.

上 大学 时, 我 喜欢 打 游戏。√

Shàng dàxué shí, wǒ xǐhuan le dǎ yóuxì.

*上 大学 时, 我 喜欢 了 打 游戏。×

4. When “了” is used in a future tense, there are usually two actions. “了” is usually placed after the first action, indicating the second action will take place after the first action.

Structure: verb1+了.....+verb2.....

Examples:

Wǒ dào le Měiguó jiù gěi nǐ dǎ diànhuà.

(1) 我 到了 美国 就 给你 打 电话。

I'll call you when I arrive in the US.

Wǒ xiàle kè qù zhǎo nǐ.

(2) 我 下了 课 去 找 你。

I'll see you after class.

Tāmen zhǔnbèi bìyè le jiù jiéhūn.

(3) 他们 准备 毕业了 就 结婚。

They are going to get married right after they graduate.

Part 4

Double 了

“了” can appear both at the end of a sentence and after the verb.

Structure: verb+了+.....+了。 up to now, so far

Examples:

Tā lái Zhōngguó sān nián le.

(1) 他 来了 中国 三 年 了。

He has been in China for three years.

Wǒ xuéxí Hànyǔ xuéle sì ge yuè le.

(2) 我 学习 汉语 学了 四 个月 了。

I have studied Chinese for four months.

Wǒ yǐjīng chàngle yì shǒu gē le.

(3) 我 已经 唱了 一 首 歌 了。

I have sung one song.