Introducing quà and the semantics of excess

(1) Two word orders for Vietnamese excessive quà:
Quà báo nanny (quà to to quà):
CL ball this QUÀ big big QUÀ
= 'This ball is too big.' [... I want a smaller one.]

Quà is unusual in allowing both pre- and post-adjectival positions:
'very' 'quite' 'more' 'as' 'enough' 'too'
*A rất A hão A hồn A bằng A dâu A quà
rất A hào A hồn A bằng A ở A quà

(2) Two components of excessive meaning:
Sarah is too tall (purpose to ride the bus for free).

a. Purpose-oriented excessive truth conditions:
max(λd : Sarah is d-tall) > max(λd : if Sarah is d'-tall, can P)
Meier 2003: 70: 'the standard of comparison is... an upper bound of
admissibility, and the value of the object lies above this value.'

b. Malefactive inference:
Sarah's height negatively affects the speaker or Sarah.
Nouwen 2018: 'at some indeterminate level of analysis, excess is bad
and sufficiency is good...'

These two uses of quà reflect different grammatical strategies for the expression of excess:
Post-adjectival quà is a comparative with not-at-issue malefactive inference (2b); pre-adjectival quà has excessive truth conditions (2a)

Post-adjectival quà

(3) Cannot take a dé purpose clause:
Sẽ dây này dài quà? (sẽ dé bước theo cách này).]
CL string this long QUÀ dél tie this way
= 'This string is too long (sẽ dé tie this way).'

(4) Can take a measure phrase standard, like comparative hón:
Sẽ dây này dài (quà / hòn) 2m.
CL string this long QUÀ hòn 2m
= 'This string is longer than 2m.' (quà ~ malefactive)
# 'This string is too long too.'

➔ A comparative with a not-at-issue malefactive inference:
S1: We need a string LESS than 2m long.
S2: We need a string AT LEAST 2m long.

(5) Quà requires the speaker to be negatively affected:
Sẽ dây này dài quà 2m. √ S1 - # S2
CL string this long QUÀ 2m
= 'This string is longer than 2m.' and that's a problem

(6) Sẽ dây này dài hòn 2m. √ S1 - √ S2
CL string this long hòn 2m
= 'This string is longer than 2m.' (simple comparative)

(7) The malefactive inference projects through negation:
Sẽ dây này không dài quà 2m. √ S1 - # S2
CL string this not long QUÀ 2m
= 'This string is not longer than 2m.' but that would be a problem

Pre-adjectival quà

(8) Purpose-oriented excessive:
Quà báo nanny quà to (quà đé vào cái hộp).
CL ball this quà big de fit CL box
'This ball is too big (quà đé vào cái hộp).
max(λd : this ball is d-big) > max(λd : if the ball is d'-big, can P)

Subjective ‘very’ quà
➔ But pre-adjectival quà can also mean ‘very,’ in situations where a subjective (qualitative) judgment is made:

(9) Câu trả lời quà / rát đúng
CL answer QUÀ / rát very correct
'The answer is very correct.'
S1: We are reading opinion articles. √ quà / rát
S2: We are reviewing students’ exam answers, which have been graded and have grades on them. # quà / rát

(10) Subjective quà can take a comparison class, but excessive pre-adjectival quà cannot:
So với Kim, Minh quà cao
compare with Kim, Minh QUÀ tall
= 'Compared with Kim, Minh is very tall.'
≠ 'Compared with Kim, Minh is too tall (for some purpose).'

Mitrative quà

(11) Has no malefactive inference:
Cái bàn này to quà? (tất rất thích.)
CL table this big QUÀ I very like
'Wow, this table is very big! (I like it.)'

(12) Incompatible with comparative standards:
Cái bàn này to quà (‘2m’)
CL table this big QUÀ 2m
'Wow, this table is (very big / *bigger than 2m)!'

(13) Subject to a recency restriction:
Context: I've been looking for a very big table.

a. A day ago, I saw a table which I thought was extremely big.
Now I am telling you about it.

Mitrative evidentials in many languages have such a recency restriction (Rett & Murray 2013).

Mitrative and subjective quà cannot be embeded or denied

(14) Minh nghĩ (cái bàn này quà to to quà). Minh thinks CL table this QUÀ big big QUÀ
'Minh thinks this table is...'

a. quà to: # 'very big' (subjective) √ 'too big'
b. to quà: # 'big' (mirative) √ 'bigger' ~ malefactive

(15) Cái bàn này quà to (to quà) không?
CL table this QUÀ big big QUÀ n/O
'Is this table...'

a. quà to: # 'very big?' (subjective) √ 'too big?'
b. to quà: # 'big?' (mirative) √ 'bigger?' ~ malefactive

(16) A: Cái bàn này quà to (to quà) B: Không.
CL table this QUÀ big big QUÀ no
'This table is...'

a. quà to: # 'very big?' (subjective) √ 'too big?'
b. to quà: # 'big?' (mirative) √ 'bigger?' ~ malefactive

Unembeddability and undeniability are both properties of mitrative evidentials (Rett & Murray 2013) and English "integrated man" (McCready 2009), which we propose that subjective quà is similar to.
➔ These quà are purely expressive — not asserted — claims of high degree, with mitrative quà adding mirativity. Being purely expressive/ illocutionary makes them unembeddable and not directly deniable.