

Introducing *quá* and the semantics of excess

(1) Two word orders for Vietnamese excessive *quá*:

Quả bóng này {**quá to** / **to quá**}.
CL ball this QUÁ big big QUÁ
≈ ‘This ball is too big.’ [...I want a smaller one.]

Quá is unusual in allowing both pre- and post-adjectival positions:

‘very’	‘quite’	‘more’	‘as’	‘enough’	‘too’
*A rất	*A hơi	A hơn	A bằng	*A đủ	A quá
rất A	hơi A	*hơn A	*bằng A	đủ A	quá A

(2) Two components of excessive meaning:

Sarah is too tall [_{purpose P} to ride the bus for free].

a. Purpose-oriented excessive truth conditions:

$\max(\lambda d . \text{Sarah is } d\text{-tall}) > \max(\lambda d' . \text{if Sarah is } d'\text{-tall, can } P)$

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 *quá* reflect different grammatical strategies for the expression of excess:

Post-adjectival *quá* is a comparative with not-at-issue malefactive inference (2b); pre-adjectival *quá* has excessive truth conditions (2a)

Post-adjectival *quá*

(3) Cannot take a *để* purpose clause:

Sợi dây này **dài quá** (*[_P để buộc theo cách này]).
CL string this long QUÁ ĐỂ tie way this
≈ ‘This string is too long (*[_P to tie this way]).’

(4) Can take a measure phrase standard, like comparative *hơn*:

Sợi dây này **dài {quá / hơn} 2m**.
CL string this long QUÁ HƠN 2m
≈ ‘This string is longer than 2m.’ (QUÁ ~ malefactive)
≠ ‘This string is 2m too long.’

→ 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) *Quá* requires the speaker to be negatively affected:

Sợi dây này **dài quá** 2m. √ S1 - # S2
CL string this long QUÁ 2m
≈ ‘This string is longer than 2m.’ ~ and that’s a problem

(6) Sợi dây này **dài hơn** 2m. √ S1 - √ S2

CL string this long HƠN 2m
‘This string is longer than 2m.’ (simple comparative)

(7) The malefactive inference projects through negation:

Sợi dây này **không dài quá** 2m. √ S1 - # S2
CL string this not long QUÁ 2m
≈ ‘This string is not longer than 2m.’ ~ but that *would* be a problem

Pre-adjectival *quá*

(8) Purpose-oriented excessive:

Quả bóng này **quá to** ([_P để vừa cái hộp]).
CL ball this QUÁ big ĐỂ fit CL box
‘This ball is too big ([_P to fit the box]).’
 $\max(\lambda d . \text{this ball is } d\text{-big}) > \max(\lambda d' . \text{if the ball is } d'\text{-big, can } P)$

Subjective ‘very’ *quá*

→ But pre-adjectival *quá* can also mean ‘very,’ in situations where a subjective (qualitative) judgment is made:

(9) Câu trả lời {**quá / rất**} **đúng**.

CL answer QUÁ very correct
‘The answer is very correct.’

S1: We are reading opinion articles. √ *quá* - √ *rất*
S2: We are reviewing students’ exam answers, which have been graded and have grades on them. # *quá* - √ *rất*

(10) Subjective *quá* can take a comparison class, but excessive pre-adjectival *quá* cannot:

So **với Kim**, Minh **quá cao**.
compare with Kim Minh QUÁ tall
= ‘Compared with Kim, Minh is very tall.’
≠ ‘Compared with Kim, Minh is too tall [for some purpose].’

Mirative *quá*

At first glance, looks like post-adjectival *quá*, but...

(11) Has no malefactive inference:

Cái bàn này **to quá!** (Tở rất thích.)
CL table this big QUÁ I very like
‘Wow, this table is very big! (I like it.)’

(12) Incompatible with comparative standards:

Cái bàn này **to quá** (*2m²)!
CL table this big QUÁ 2m²
‘Wow, this table is {very big / *bigger than 2m²}!’

(13) Subject to a recency restriction:

Context: I’ve been looking for a very big table.

a. When I come home, I see a table which is extremely big. √ (11)
b. A day ago, I saw a table which I thought was extremely big.
Now I am telling you about it. # (11)

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

Mirative and subjective *quá* cannot be embedded or denied

(14) Minh nghĩ [cái bàn này {**quá to** / **to quá**}].

Minh think CL table this QUÁ big big QUÁ
‘Minh thinks this table is...’

a. *quá to*: # ‘very big’ (subjective) √ ‘too big’
b. *to quá*: # ‘big!’ (mirative) √ ‘bigger’ ~ malefactive

(15) Cái bàn này {**quá to** / **to quá**} không?

CL table this QUÁ big big QUÁ Y/N-Q
‘Is this table...’

a. *quá to*: # ‘very big?’ (subjective) √ ‘too big?’
b. *to quá*: # ‘big!?’ (mirative) √ ‘bigger?’ ~ malefactive

(16) A: Cái bàn này {**quá to** / **to quá**} B: Không.

CL table this QUÁ big big QUÁ no
‘This table is...’ ‘No.’

a. *quá to*: # ‘very big’ (subjective) √ ‘too big’
b. *to quá*: # ‘big!’ (mirative) √ ‘bigger’ ~ malefactive

Unembeddability and undeniability are both properties of mirative evidentials (Rett & Murray 2013) and English “integrated *man*” (McCready 2009), which we propose that subjective *quá* is similar to.

→ These *quá* are **purely expressive** — not asserted — claims of high degree, with mirative *quá* adding mirativity. Being purely expressive/illocutionary makes them unembeddable and not directly deniable.