Ingredients of excess: A study of Vietnamese quá

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(1) Quả bóng này {quá to/ to quá}.  
≈ ‘This ball is too big.” […] I want a smaller one.”
Excessive constructions may encode two kinds of meanings:

(2) Sarah is too tall \([\text{purpose}] \text{ to ride the bus for free}\].

a. **Purpose-oriented excessive truth conditions**

A purpose determines “an upper bound of admissibility, and the value of the object lies above this value” (Meier 2003).

b. **Malefactive inference**

(see e.g. Nouwen 2018)

The extent of Sarah’s height negatively affects the speaker or Sarah.

These two different meanings in (a) and (b) are conventionally encoded by the two different excessive constructions in Vietnamese, both involving the morpheme quá.
Pre-adjectival *quá*: purpose-oriented excessive

(3) Quả bóng này quá to [để vừa cái hộp].

‘This ball is too big [to fit the box].’
Post-adjectival quá:

• Cannot take a để purpose clause.

• Can take a measure phrase standard, like comparative hòn:

(4) Sợi dây này dài {quá / hòn} (2m).

CL string this long QUÁ HÓN 2m
‘This string is longer than 2m.’ QUÁ ~ and that’s a problem
≠ ‘This string is 2m too long.’
Post-adjectival *quá*: comparative with malefactive inference

- The speaker must be negatively affected.

(5)  Sọi dây này dài quá 2m.
   CL string this long quá 2m
   ‘This string is longer than 2m.’
   ∼ being longer than 2m would be a problem

√ Context 1: We need a string which is LESS than 2m long.
   We find a 2.5m string.

# Context 2: We need a string which is AT LEAST 2m long.
   We find a 2.5m string.
Post-adjectival quá: comparative with malefactive inference

- The malefactive inference projects through negation.

(6) Sợi dây này không dài quá 2m.

This string is not longer than 2m.

↝ being longer than 2m would be a problem

√ Context 1: We need a string which is LESS than 2m long. We find a 1.5m string.

# Context 2: We need a string which is AT LEAST 2m long. We find a 1.5m string.
The two quá constructions reflect two different approaches to the expression of excess.

- Pre-adjectival quá is a **purposed-oriented excessive**.
- Post-adjectival quá is a **comparative** encoding a **not-at-issue malefactive inference**.

**At the poster:** Additional, non-excessive and mirative uses of quá!