

Ingredients of excess: A study of Vietnamese *quá*

Anne Nguyen and Michael Yoshitaka Erlewine (mitcho)
National University of Singapore

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

Excessive constructions may encode two kinds of meanings:

(2) Sarah is too tall [_{purpose} 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** [_P **để vừa cái hộp**].

CL ball this QUÁ big ĐỂ fit CL box

‘This ball is too big [_P to fit the box].’

Post-adjectival *quá*:

- Cannot take a *để* purpose clause.
- Can take a measure phrase standard, like comparative *hơn*:

(4) Sợi dây này dài {**quá / hơn**} (2m).

CL string this long QUÁ HƠN 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) Sợi 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.

CL string this not long 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*!