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CorCass and *CorCos*: The Corpora of the Italian Supreme Court and Constitutional Court

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ABSTRACT

The language of supreme court justices has long been analysed in the literature because of the socio-political values it carries. This paper is aimed at contributing to the current research by presenting two corpora of supreme court judgements: *CorCass* and *CorCos*. The former contains the judgments of the Italian Corte di Cassazione (“Court of Cassation”) collected between 2023 and 2025; the latter features the judgments of the Italian Corte Costituzionale (“Constitutional Court”) in the same time frame. To showcase the epistemic usefulness and applicability of such corpus materials in linguistics, legilinguistics and semiotics, this paper carries out a host of corpus linguistic analyses. Amongst these, high-frequency words, keyness, collocations, and n-grams are addressed, thus unveiling the language strategies adopted by the courts.

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KEYWORDS: supreme courts; legal semiotics; legilinguistics; supreme court decisions; corpus linguistics

1. Introduction

The language employed by the justices of supreme courts has garnered scholarly attention in view, amongst others, of the linguistic strategies deployed. Supreme courts judges apply the highest level of judgment (Tracy 2020), thus shaping not only the way justice is delivered in a country, but also how laws must be interpreted and how society can evolve. Indeed, supreme courts are called on to decide on highly controversial issues, thus producing relevant political, economic, and social effects (Tracy 2020, 258).

For these reasons, several scholars have investigated supreme courts' language patterning to unveil stylistic, rhetorical and pragmatic strategies. For example, Vass (2004) explores the communication patterns adopted by the justices of the US Supreme Court between 1998 and 2003. Such forms contain very few instances of hedging leveraging modal verbs. On the contrary, subordinate clauses expressing concessions and prepositional phrases commenting on previous statements are much more frequent (Vass 2004, 134). In this way, supreme court judges display indetermination, depersonalisation, subjectivisation, and limitation to convey tentativeness. The author also underscores how justices' decisions function as operative, interpersonal and educational landmarks. From an operative perspective, they provide resolutions that must be complied with by lower courts in future proceedings. From an interpersonal standpoint, their rulings act as guides impacting on public policies. From an educational point of view, supreme court justices illuminate what is or is not constitutionally admissible, thereby shaping the evolution of fundamental societal values (Vass 2004, 133).

For these reasons, Visconti (2016a) posits that writing a court ruling is a complex task as it entails the application of four different skills: narrative, expository, argumentative, and prescriptive. The first two are necessary for the development of the judges' stances; the argumentative competence is conducive to reasoning as it furnishes the motivations for the application of specific legal principles. The prescriptive skills are mandatory in the operative part, as they require compliance by institutions and citizens. Consequently, the language strategies developed by justices are multi-faceted and have far-reaching consequences.

Given the importance of analysing and studying supreme courts' language patterning, Rodríguez-Puente and Hernández-Coalla (2022 and 2023) developed a corpus of contemporary English legal decisions (CoCELD), featuring the judgments issued by the UK Privy Council, House of Lords, and Supreme Court. In this way, the authors offer various insights into judicial language. Amongst others, their analyses reveal a prominent use of first-person singular pronouns ("I"), which encapsulate the opinions, positions, beliefs and interpretations of judges (*ibid.*, 11).

Lee and Mouritsen (2021) employ corpus linguistics to unveil the pragmatic and metadiscursive strategies followed by the US Supreme Court. Amongst others, the authors posit that corpus linguistics can be harnessed as an evidence-based

resource that favours legal discourse analysis in several manners. For example, by showcasing word usages in context, corpus evidence allows for a thorough assessment of justices' pragmatics and rhetoric. In this way, corpus analysis helps capturing nuanced meanings and the communicative content of law and judgments. With a view to allowing for more transparent interpretation of laws and reducing possible biased constructions, Lee and Mouritsen (2021) also highlight that corpus linguistics helps shed light on polysemous terminology. Indeed, the consultation of corpora and the analysis of word usages in context enable the reliance on factual evidence, rather than judicial intuition, thus accessing authentic word senses and fostering the disambiguation of word meanings.

Other scholars have carried out linguistic analyses of supreme court decisions in an effort to reveal key language patterns, which feature the words and terms that make justices' discourse unique and different from standard language. Michta (2022) assesses the collocations of "evidence" in a general and legal corpus. The former is the BNC written sub-corpus, whereas the latter is composed of judgements issued by the UK Supreme Court. The author finds that the legal corpus presents highly recurrent fixed collocations featuring terms such as "expert", "oral", "fresh", "relevant", and "hearsay". Amongst others, only three terms are found in both corpora, i.e., "new", "further", and "sufficient", thus underscoring the highly specificity of the language of the supreme court.

Trklja (2025) examines the genre structure of the judgments of the Court of Justice of the European Union. The author reveals the pivotal role played by linguistic expressions in the shaping of the language of the court, thus foregrounding salient pragmatic and rhetorical patterns. Amongst others, for example, the author pinpoints a certain structural rigidity due to repetitive elements and a textual organisation that is not always crystal-clear.

Some strands of the literature, in fact, have criticised the convoluted language employed in supreme courts' decisions (Whalen 2015; Visconti 2016a). By consulting a corpus of over 6,000 US Supreme Court decisions, Whalen (2015) claims that the supreme courts' writing style has gradually become more complex and difficult to grasp. Additionally, the author indicates stylistic differences on the basis of the conservative vs liberal position assumed by justices, where conservative decisions tend to be arduous to understand, whereas liberal ones are more reader-friendly.

With a view to easifying legal language and, in particular, the language of judgements, Ragazzini et al. (2025) develop a dataset (namely, LAWSUIT) aimed at summarising and paraphrasing the basic information of the judgments of the Italian Constitutional Court. The toolkit proposes legal verdicts in reader-friendly versions, thereby rendering the language of judgements more accessible. At the same time, the authors involve legal experts, scholars, and judges in the fine-tuning of the tool and in the monitoring of the final texts produced. In this way, not only is legal discourse streamlined to the advantage of laypeople, but it also maintains rigour and accuracy.

Other scholars have emphasised justices' commitment to clarity when addressing and interpreting laws. For instance, Mortara Garavelli (2014) praises the language of the justices of the *Corte Costituzionale* ("Constitutional Court"¹) for their coherence of reasoning. Additionally, the author finds that discursive cohesion is particularly notable. In a related vein, Visconti (2016b) examines Italian justices' reflections on and evaluations of statutes' ambiguous usages of adverbs and conjunctions, thereby addressing and shedding light on polysemous language. The author pinpoints weaknesses in legal statutory documents and discusses how the judges of the Italian *Corte Costituzionale* have striven to interpret and clarify intricate passages for the sake of comprehensibility. In this way, Visconti underlines salient judges' interventions in support of readability and access to constitutional values. Visconti (2016a) also emphasises the importance of supreme courts' intervention in clarifying word usages. Amongst others, the author praises the fact that the Italian *Corte di Cassazione* ("Court of Cassation", i.e., the Italian Supreme Court) ruled that the conjunction *ovvero* ("or") was ambiguous, as it can assume both explicative and disjunctive values. In the former case, it signifies "in other words", whereas in the latter, it means "otherwise". Therefore, the intervention of the Court was essential to shed light on unclear statutory wording.

The importance given by the justices of the Italian Court of Cassation and Constitutional Court to language and clarity has also been underscored by Lan-

¹ The Italian Constitutional Court oversees the conformity of laws with the Constitution, resolves disputes over attributions between powers or entities, evaluates the admissibility of abrogative referendums, and adjudicates the criminal liability of the President of the Republic.

za (2004). The author reports that the *Corte di Cassazione* provided a definition of certain judgements as “apparent” when, although graphically correct, they lack coherence, completeness and logic, thus rendering the provisions envisaged null or inapplicable.

From a lexicology perspective, scholars have also focused on collocations, n-grams, and key words or keyness in legal texts. A collocation is “the company a word keeps” (Firth 1957, 11). Sinclair (1991) defines it as “the occurrence of two or more words within a short space of each other in a text” (Sinclair 1991, 170). Mason and Canham (2021) distinguish strong collocations from weak collocations. Collocations are “strong” when it is difficult to find other word combinations with the same meaning or expressing similar legal principles (e.g., “mitigate a loss”). Conversely, collocations are “weak” when several word pairs carry the same meaning (e.g., “fulfil an obligation”).

N-grams are sequences of “n” words characterising a specific corpus. N-grams are also termed multi-words or lexical bundles (Biber and Conrad 1999). Katz et al. (2011) examine the n-grams obtained from a corpus of the decisions of the US Supreme Court delivered from 1791 to 2005. By doing so, the authors carry out a diachronic analysis uncovering linguistic changes that have occurred over time. In a related vein, Goźdz-Roszkowski (2012, 60-66) retrieves and analyses n-grams from a corpus of opinions of the Supreme Court of the United States of America from 2000 to 2007. The author scrutinises the multi-words featuring the term “discovery” and brings to the fore several terminological co-occurrences, such as “vacate the discovery”, “dispute the discovery”, “objections to the discovery” (ibid., 60). Giampieri (2024) focuses on terms of service and extracts n-grams and keywords (which are the words that are particularly notable in a given corpus and distinguish it from another one). The findings indicate several domain-specific language patterning, some of which are particularly repetitive, thereby underscoring little lexical and semantic variation.

According to Scott (1997, 236), a keyword is “a word which occurs with unusual frequency in a given text [...] by comparison with a reference corpus of some kind”. By retrieving keywords from different corpora, keyness analysis is carried out (Gabrielatos 2018), thus unveiling specific language peculiarities. Breeze (2019) explores key parts of speech in four different corpora on legal documents, statutes, legal academic writing, and the case law. The author posits that

the case law and legal academic writing feature language patterns that can be found in argumentative texts, whereas legal documents and statutes are heavily characterised by cohesion and modality.

Given the scholarly interest in studying and exploring the linguistic approaches and strategies pursued by supreme courts, this paper is aimed at presenting and employing *CorCass* and *CorCos*: two corpora of Italian supreme and constitutional court's decisions, respectively, for legal language analysis purposes. Within the scope of this study, both the Italian Court of Cassation and the Italian Constitutional Court are considered as "supreme courts" in view of the high powers and authorities they are vested.

2. Aim of the paper

This paper is aimed at introducing *CorCass* and *CorCos* as two valuable reference corpora featuring the decisions of the Italian Court of Cassation and Constitutional Court, respectively. It shows their linguistic contents and how they can be explored to undertake lexicollinguistic analyses, thus uncovering the language patterning of the Italian supreme courts.

The questions that this paper aims to address are the following: 1) What are the linguistic differences emerging from *CorCass* and *CorCos*?, and 2) Which salient language patterns emerge from the two corpora?

3. Methodology

CorCass is the corpus of the decisions of the Italian *Corte di Cassazione* ("Court of Cassation") delivered between 2023 and 2025 in the matter of civil proceedings. *CorCos* contains the decisions of the Italian *Corte Costituzionale* ("Constitutional Court") also delivered between 2023 and 2025. *CorCass* features 1,150,628 tokens, whereas *CorCos* is composed of 305,431 tokens.

The procedures followed to create *CorCass* and *CorCos* are similar. The judgments delivered by the *Corte di Cassazione* (civil cases) and those passed by the *Corte Costituzionale* were retrieved from the *Corte di Cassazione*'s domain (i.e.,

<https://www.cortedicassazione.it/>). From this portal, users can access separate sections dedicated to the Court of Cassation's civil rulings, criminal rulings, and the decisions of the Constitutional Court².

The representativeness and replicability of the resulting data and consequently of the corpora, are ensured by the open-access nature of the repository, where the relevant information is available. For corpus compilation purposes, the Court of Cassation's decisions in civil cases from 2023 to 2025 were downloaded, along with the decisions by the Constitutional Court between 2023 and 2025. At the time of the corpus compilation, 2023 was the earliest available year in the portal.

The judgments were downloaded manually, thus retrieving files in pdf format, which were converted into txt format. These were then uploaded to AntConc (Anthony 2026), an offline concordancer used for corpus analysis purposes. Amongst others, AntConc allows for the generation and analysis of collocations (i.e., frequent word pairs or word combinations); key terms (i.e., words or terms characterising a specific corpus when compared with another one); n-grams (i.e., sequences of "n" words), and so on. The Voyant Tools platform (Sinclair and Rockwell 2026) was also accessed to showcase how words are distinctive and combine within a corpus. More precisely, this software was employed because it creates word clouds, i.e., graphic representations of word frequencies in a corpus, so that the more frequent a term is, the larger it is displayed.

This software was used because its visual representations clearly exhibit corpus data at a glance. In addition, AntConc allowed for the generation of frequency lists and frequency data, thereby producing more rigorous and detailed results. Therefore, the reason for choosing both tools is due to the fact that they allow users to carry out distinct and complementary corpus linguistic analyses.

The following elements are focused on for the purposes of this study: high-frequency terms (i.e., the most recurrent terminology excluding function words such as (in)definite articles); collocations (which are word pairs that no-

² More precisely, the judgments issued by the *Corte di Cassazione* were retrieved from the following direct link: https://www.cortedicassazione.it/it/giurisprudenza_civile.page?frame3_item=1, whereas the judgments by the *Corte Costituzionale* were obtained from https://www.cortedicassazione.it/it/costituzionale_sovranazionale.page?search=&it_tipo_doc_copy=Sentenza&it_tipo_doc_copy=Ordinanza.

tably emerge from a corpus); key terms (as mentioned, they consist of the terminology characterising a specific corpus when comparing it with another one), and n-grams (as indicated, they are sequences of n words featured in a corpus).

Such linguistic elements were investigated in all decisions by the two Italian courts in the selected period (i.e., between 2023 and 2025).

4. Analysis

This section is aimed at showcasing the linguistic contents and features of *CorCass* and *CorCoss*, thus exhibiting how such corpora can be harnessed for (legi) linguistic analyses. It also focuses on legal semiotics, thus displaying how meaning can be shaped and constructed in the legal domain and, in particular, in Italian supreme courts' decisions.

4.1. High frequency terms

The first analysis is concerned with the top frequency terms characterising the corpora. The corpora are uploaded to the Voyant Tools platform to display high-frequency terms (excluding functional words such as definite articles). Figure 1 illustrates the results in a comparable format.

It is very interesting to notice that several words are common, such as *n* (meaning “number”, referring to an article or section number of an Act), *comma* (“paragraph”), *legge* (“Act”), *sentenza* (“judgment”), *corte* (“court”), *giudice* (“judge”), and *secondo* (literally “second”, but signifying “according to”). This implies that the key terminology hallmarking the language of both types of justices is extremely similar. Indeed, the two corpora showcase a high degree of uniformity and representativeness. Probably, both justices pursue similar pragmatic and rhetorical strategies, which the next sections of this paper are aimed at uncovering.

Table 1 showcases the relative frequencies of the above recurrent terms. Occurrences are extracted from the two corpora by using AntConc and are expressed in per-million-token (pmT) values.

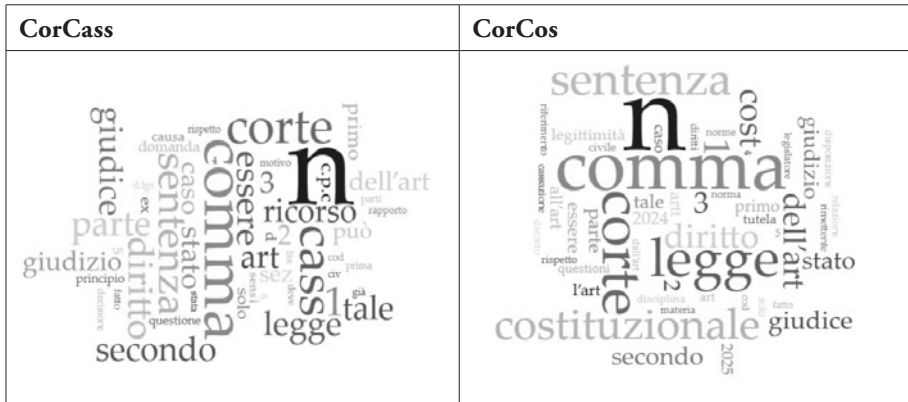


Figure 1. High-frequency terms in CorCass and CorCos

Table 1. Most recurrent terms in *CorCass* and *CorCos*

No.	Terms	Back-translations	CorCass freq. pmT	CorCos freq. pmT
1	<i>Secondo</i>	According to	2,055.40	2,236.18
2	<i>Giudice</i>	Judge	2,098.85	2,334.41
3	<i>Sentenza</i>	Judgment	2,509.94	3,902.68
4	<i>Legge</i>	Law	2,103.20	3,758.63
5	<i>Corte</i>	Court	3,240.84	5,310.53
6	<i>Comma</i>	Paragraph	3,417.26	5,749.25
7	<i>n.</i>	n.	10,223.98	12,621.51

As can be seen, *secondo* (“according to”) is the least frequent item, displaying approximately 2,000 relative frequencies in both corpora. On the other hand, “n.” is the most recurrent item in both datasets, occurring over 10,000 times. Given their limited semantic significance, these two items are excluded from further analysis. Almost the same can be said of *comma* (ranking sixth). Namely, *comma* (“paragraph”) offers limited opportunities for semantic investigations due to its monoreferential value. Highly recurrent terms such as *legge* and *corte* (ranking fourth and fifth, respectively) have already been extensively explored in

literature-driven studies, especially for their polysemous nature (Giampieri forthcoming). For these reasons, this paper focuses on *giudice* and explores its usages across the two corpora. As a matter of fact, in supreme court decisions, this term denotes and expresses authority, procedural legitimacy and power. Also, *giudice* may refer to a person, an office, or an institutional actor. Therefore, its usages in *CorCass* and *CorCos* may be various and varied. Hence, examining the words *giudice* pairs with in each corpus may reveal interesting language patterns.

4.2. Collocations

For the reasons stated above, the collocations of *giudice* are explored in both corpora by using AntConc. Table 2 displays the top fifteen words pairing with *giudice* in *CorCass* within a span of 5 words to the left and 5 words to the right. Grammatical words are excluded from the results; frequencies are expressed in per-million-token values.

As observable from Table 2, there are semantically relevant terms that highly characterise the language of the decisions of the Italian Court of Cassation. For example, *merito* (“merit”), *giurisdizione* (“jurisdiction”), *parte* (“party”), and *appello* (“appeal”) top the list. To some extent, the term *merito* (line 1) is ambiguous because it does not denote any “merit” (meaning “credit”), but it belongs to the noun phrase *giudice di merito* (“trial judge”), identifying the judge who has the power to rule on particular cases. A sample phrase in this regard is *una volta che il giudice di merito abbia fondato la propria decisione su un dato probatorio preso in considerazione nella sua oggettività* (“once the trial judge has based their decision on a piece of evidence considered in its objective reality”). Likewise, *ordinario* (“ordinary”, line 10) refers to an ordinary court with general jurisdiction over civil and criminal disputes, thus indicating the Italian Justice of the Peace, the Tribunal, the Court of Appeal and the Court of Cassation. Therefore, (*giudice*) *ordinario* assumes specific significance within the Italian justice system. A corpus-sourced sentence is as follows: *il Tribunale ritenne che la giurisdizione sulla domanda spettasse al giudice ordinario e non al giudice amministrativo* (“the Court held that jurisdiction over the claim lay with the ordinary courts rather than the administrative courts”). In a related vein, *esecuzione* (“execution”, line 9) denotes

Table 2. Collocates of *giudice* in *CorCass*

No.	Collocates	Back-translations	Freq. pmT
1	<i>Merito</i>	Merit	203.37
2	<i>Giurisdizione</i>	Jurisdiction	119.07
3	<i>Nazionale</i>	National	103.42
4	<i>Parte</i>	Party	93.86
5	<i>Appello</i>	Appeal	92.12
6	<i>Ordinario</i>	Ordinary	91.25
7	<i>Sia</i>	Be	87.78
8	<i>Primo</i>	First	78.22
9	<i>Esecuzione</i>	Execution	74.74
10	<i>Deve</i>	Must	71.27
11	<i>Può</i>	Can	68.66
12	<i>N</i>	N	64.31
13	<i>Amministrativo</i>	Administrative	62.57
14	<i>Dinanzi</i>	Before	59.10
15	<i>Art</i>	Art	55.62

another particular judging figure, who directs and supervises enforcement procedures, thus ensuring the coercive implementation of enforcement titles, both in civil proceedings (e.g., expropriations) and in criminal proceedings (e.g., application of penalties/measures). Therefore, *esecuzione* is imbued with a particular meaning within the noun phrase *giudice dell'esecuzione* (“enforcement judge”). A corpus-sourced sample phrase is *chiedendo al giudice dell'esecuzione di farsi carico del controllo sull'abusività* (“asking the enforcement judge to verify unlawfulness”).

Table 2 also features finites such as *sia* (“be” in the conjunctive mood, line 7) and modal verbs (*deve*, “must”, and *può* “can”, lines 10 and 11). Abbreviations appear in lines 12 and 15 (*n* and *art*, respectively). In this respect, it should be pointed out that legal texts are generally characterized by abbreviations. Addi-

tionally, abbreviations may be notable due to Zipf’s law, according to which the frequency of a word is approximately inversely proportional to its rank (Montemurro and Zanette 2013). Line 14 features an interesting adverb, i.e., *dinanzi* (“before”, line 14), which forms the adverbial phrase *dinanzi al giudice* or *dinanzi al tribunale* (meaning “before the judge/court”), thereby encapsulating a particular legal connotation.

Table 3 is concerned with the words pairing with *giudice* in *CorCos*. The AntConc software was used to obtain such data.

Table 3. Collocates of *giudice* in *CorCos*

No.	Collocate	Back-translations	Freq. pmT
1	<i>Rimettente</i>	Referring	239.01
2	<i>Udienza</i>	Hearing	114.59
3	<i>Tutelare</i>	Guardianship	114.59
4	<i>N</i>	N	101.50
5	<i>Avrebbe</i>	Would have	81.85
6	<i>Art</i>	Art	75.30
7	<i>Tribunale</i>	Court	75.30
8	<i>Pubblica</i>	Public	65.48
9	<i>Pace</i>	Peace	62.21
10	<i>Manifesta</i>	Manifest	58.93
11	<i>Convalida</i>	Validation	58.93
12	<i>Relatrice</i>	Speaker; reporter	58.93
13	<i>Terzietà</i>	Third-partiness	55.66
14	<i>Relatore</i>	Speaker; reporter	55.66
15	<i>Ritiene</i>	Holds	55.66

Table 3 features some highly specific terminology that could be difficult to grasp by laypeople, especially if deprived of its context. Terms such as *rimettente* (“referring”, line 1), *tutelare* (“guardianship”, line 3), and *terzietà* (“third-parti-

ness”, or “impartiality”, line 13) are highly technical and heavily characterise the language of the court. *Rimettente*, for example, tops the list and occurs over 239 times in the corpus, whereas *tutelare* produces over 114 hits. On the other hand, *terzietà* is a term employed only in the legal sphere. Hence, it is characterised by a high level of specificity. Sample phrases extracted from *CorCos* are the following: *il giudice rimettente afferma di non dover applicare la disposizione* (“the referring judge states that the provision need not be applied”); *il provvedimento convalidato dal giudice tutelare* (“the measure ratified by the supervising judge”), and *il principio della terzietà del giudice* (“the principle of judicial impartiality”).

Table 3 also contains terms that are polysemous, as they have ambiguous meanings and assume precise significance within the legal (and judicial) domain. For instance, *relatrice* and *relatore* (lines 12 and 14, respectively) do not identify any conventional “speaker”, but a reporting judge, i.e., a member of the judging panel that is responsible for studying a case file, preparing a technical report, and explaining the facts and legal issues to the other justices³. Likewise, *pace* specifically refers to *giudice di pace* (“justice of the peace”), thus identifying a magistrate entrusted with particular duties. As can be grasped, notions of the activities carried out by the Constitutional Court and of the related terminology is necessary to understand the meaning and employment of such sectoral terminology.

4.3. Keyness

In this section, the key terms characterising each corpus are explored. Figure 2 illustrates the keywords that occur in close proximity (i.e., that collocate) in both corpora. The images are produced by the Voyant Tools.

Similarly to Figure 1, Figure 2 displays almost the same terminology in both corpora. At first glance, the most frequent key terms are *comma* (“paragraph”), *n* (“number”), and *corte* (“court”). Similarities are also noticed in the collocations of such terminology. In *CorCass* and *CorCos*, *comma* (“paragraph”) collocates with *n* (“number”), *corte* (“court”), *dell’art.* (“of article”), and “1”. Likewise, in

³ See <https://dizionario.internazionale.it/parola/giudice-relatore>.

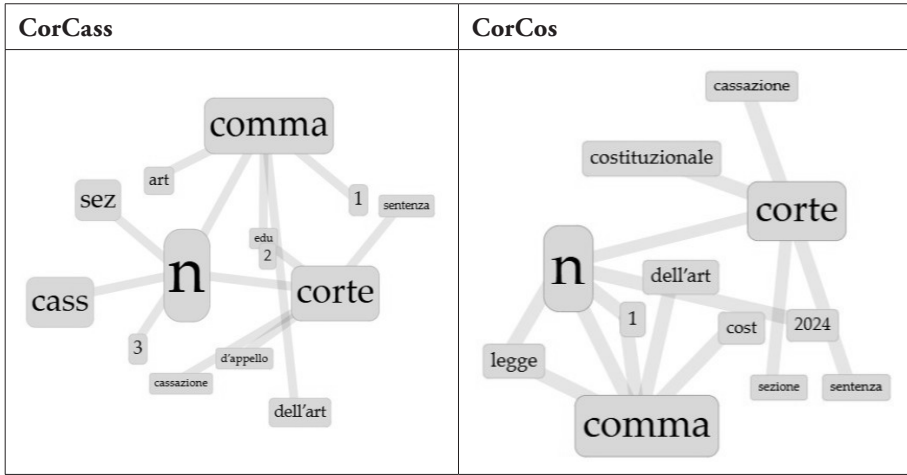


Figure 2. Keywords and terms that collocate in *CorCass* and *CorCos*

both corpora *corte* (“court”) pairs with *sentenza* (“judgment”), and *cassazione* (“cassation”).

Figure 1 and Figure 2 confirm that the language of both courts is very similar and deploys analogous terminology, thus probably developing very similar pragmatic strategies. To some extent, it can be argued that such similarity is attributed to the particular specialised language under scrutiny (i.e., Italian supreme court decisions), which is highly uniform and consistent at both lexical and pragmatic levels.

As previously mentioned, keyness is concerned with the words denoting a notably high recurrence in a corpus as resulting from the comparison with a reference corpus (Scott 1997).

The AntConc software solution features a keyness function that allows for the analysis of two corpora and the extraction of the related key terms. Therefore, the next analysis focuses on keyness, i.e., key terms characterising each specific corpus. In this case, *CorCass* and *CorCos* are used as target and reference corpora, respectively (and vice-versa). Hence, the analysis employs the two corpora reciprocally as target/reference corpora because the aim of this study is to bring to the fore the linguistic features distinguishing “cassation” judicial discourse

from the “constitutional” one, rather than differentiating judicial language from general Italian.

Table 4 showcases the fifteen most frequent key terms when setting *CorCass* as the target corpus and *CorCos* as the reference corpus (as mentioned, the Ant-Conc software solution was used to obtain data in this regard). Relative frequencies concern the target corpus (*CorCass*) and are expressed in per-million-token values. For reasons of completeness, keyness scores are also displayed, thus measuring the practical strength of the difference between the terms of the two corpora. Grammatical words are excluded from the list due to their limited semantic value (and because of Zipf’s Law).

Table 4. Keyness (*CorCass* vs *CorCos*)

No.	Keyword	Back-translation	Frequency (pmT)	Keyness Scores
1	<i>Cass</i>	Cass[ation]	3,045.29	0.006
2	<i>Ricorso</i>	Appeal; petition	2,067.57	0.004
3	<i>Sez</i>	Sect	1,650.40	0.003
4	<i>Domanda</i>	Claim	1,254.97	0.003
5	<i>Ex</i>	Under	1,400.10	0.003
6	<i>Motivo</i>	Reason	1,112.44	0.002
7	<i>Causa</i>	Cause; case	1,211.51	0.002
8	<i>Ricorrente</i>	Appellant	910.81	0.002
9	<i>Appello</i>	Appeal	1,093.32	0.002
10	<i>Sezioni</i>	Sections; Chambers	944.70	0.002
11	<i>Unite</i>	Joint	862.14	0.002
12	<i>Decisione</i>	Decision	1,009.01	0.002
13	<i>Atto</i>	Deed; act; action	1,202.82	0.002
14	<i>Processo</i>	Proceedings; trial	826.51	0.002
15	<i>Merito</i>	Merit	815.21	0.002

It is interesting to notice that Table 4 features nouns and abbreviations (i.e., *Cass* and *Sez*, see lines 1 and 3). The list also includes the Latin expression *ex* (see line 5), which is imbued with various meanings, such as “former” (as in *ex coniuge*, “former spouse”), “by virtue of” (in *ex lege*, “by virtue of law”, thus composing a legal multi-word), and “under” (as in *ex art. 360*, “under art. 360”, thereby forming another legal formula, Giampieri 2025, 72). In this way, *ex* is a highly polysemous term as it carries several significances. Strictly related to polysemy is the recurrence of ambiguous words, thus denoting the tendency to employ multisemantic vocabulary (Giampieri forthcoming). In line 2, for example, *ricorso* can be an “appeal” or a “petition”. A corpus-sourced sample sentence is, in fact, *l’Istituto ha proposto ricorso per cassazione* (“the Institution proposed a cassation appeal”). In line 4, *domanda* does not actually denote a “question”, but the claim or forms of redress demanded by the appellant (as in *inammissibilità della domanda di accertamento giudiziale*, “inadmissibility of the claim for judicial determination”). In line 7, *causa* can have multiple meanings, amongst which are “cause/ground”, “case”, and “because” (forming the syntactical phrase *a causa di*, “because of”). Sample phrases in this regard are *causa di decadenza* (“ground for forfeiture”), *a causa della mancata pattuizione* (“because of the failure to reach an agreement”), and *fatti di causa* (“in facts”, thus denoting a legal formula referring to the objective reality of a situation as determined by evidence, and distinguishing it from “in law”, which describes how the same circumstance is defined by statutes, Wilson 1990). In line 10, *sezioni* indicates the “sections” or “chambers” of the court of cassation, rather than standard “sections”. The same can be said of *atto* (line 13), which signifies “deed”, “act”, “action”, and it may also assume other specific meanings in context. In *CorCos*, in fact, *atto* appears in the following phrases: *atto di citazione* (“claim form”); *valido atto di costituzione in mora* (“valid formal notice of default”); *atto di rinuncia* (“waiver”), etc. Therefore, as could be observed, the terms featured in Table 4 are highly specific, sectoral and polysemous.

By analysing keyness scores (reported in the last column of Table 4), it is evident that values are very low, thus highlighting lexical similarities between the two corpora.

Table 5 displays AntConc’s data on *CorCos* key terms when *CorCos* is set as the target corpus and *CorCass* as the reference corpus.

Table 5. Keyness (*CorCos* vs *CorCass*)

No.	Keyword	Back-translation	Frequency (pmT)	Keynss Scores
1	<i>Art.</i>	Art.	9,998.98	0.019
2	<i>Comma</i>	Paragraph	5,749.25	0.011
3	<i>Corte</i>	Court	5,310.53	0.010
4	<i>Legge</i>	Law; Act; Statute	4,740.84	0.009
5	<i>Sentenza</i>	Judgment	3,902.68	0.008
6	<i>Costituzionale</i>	Constitutional	3,673.50	0.007
7	<i>Diritto</i>	Law	3,264.24	0.006
8	<i>Cost</i>	Const[itutional]	2,891.00	0.006
9	<i>Artt.</i>	Articles	1,941.52	0.004
10	<i>Legittimità</i>	Legitimacy	1,869.49	0.004
11	<i>Sarebbe</i>	Would be	1,692.69	0.003
12	<i>Tutela</i>	Safeguard	1,663.22	0.003
13	<i>Questioni</i>	Matters	1,640.31	0.003
14	<i>Diritti</i>	Rights	1,620.66	0.003
15	<i>Civile</i>	Civil	1,568.28	0.003

First of all, it is observable that the frequencies showcased in Table 5 are generally much higher than those reported in Table 4, thus indicating that term repetition and language fixity characterise *CorCos*. For example, *comma* (“paragraph”) and *corte* (“court”) produce over 5,000 occurrences; *legge* (“law” or “statute”) almost 5,000, and *sentenza* (“judgment”), *costituzionale* (“constitutional”), and *diritto* (“law”) over 3,000.

Table 5 also displays ambiguous (i.e., polysemous) terminology: *legge* (line 4), which refers to a specific “act” (i.e., a particular statutory document, as in *legge n. 184 del 1983*, “Act 184 of 1983”), and “law” in general (line 3) (e.g., *violazioni di legge*, “breach of law”) (Giampieri forthcoming). Likewise, *questioni* belongs to the multi-word *questioni di legittimità costituzionale* (“matters of constitutional legitimacy”), thus identifying highly specific judicial review processes. There are also abbreviations (*Art.*, line 1; *Cost*, “Const”, line 7—the latter indicating the Constitutional Court, and *Artt.*, “articles”, line 8). Similarly to Table 4, Table 5 mostly denotes nouns, with the exception of *sarebbe* (“would be”), appearing in line 11.

Keyness values are also rather low, thus confirming semantic similarities between the two corpora. Indeed, by considering the terms illustrated in Tables 4 and 5, it is possible to infer that the two lists are stylistically and syntactically analogous, as expected.

4.4. *N-grams*

This section explores the n-grams, i.e., the most frequent sequences of n words characterising each corpus. To obtain such data, the AntConc software was used. Table 6 illustrates 3-grams in *CorCass*. Frequencies are calculated on the basis of n-grams per million tokens.

Table 6. 3-grams in *CorCass*

No.	3-grams	Back-translations	Freq. pmT
1	<i>C p c</i>	Code of Civil Procedure	1,454.01
2	<i>D lgs n</i>	Legislative decree no.	766.55
3	<i>Ai sensi dell'</i>	In accordance with	695.28
4	<i>Sensi dell'art</i>	Accordance with art.	646.61
5	<i>Art c p</i>	Art. Code Procedure	602.29
6	<i>Cod proc civ</i>	Code of Civil Procedure	598.81
7	<i>Lgs n del</i>	Legislative no. of	577.08
8	<i>L n del</i>	Act No. of	533.63
9	<i>Di cui all'</i>	In accordance with	506.69
10	<i>Legge n del</i>	Act No. of	504.95
11	<i>Cass n del</i>	Cassation No. of	500.60
12	<i>Cui all'art</i>	Accordance with art.	470.18
13	<i>Del d lgs</i>	Of legislative decree	433.68
14	<i>Sentenza n del</i>	Judgment no. of	402.39
15	<i>Dell'art comma</i>	Of art. paragraph	377.19

Interestingly, Table 6 mostly denotes acronyms and lexical phrases of little semantic value, although serving highly cohesive functions. Indeed, expressions such as *ai sensi dell'articolo* or *di cui all'articolo* (“in accordance with article”) (visible in the 3-grams of lines 3, 4, 9 and 12) serve connecting purposes, as they refer to statutory prescriptions (Giampieri 2025). The same function is performed by all other expressions reported in Table 4, such as *cpc*, *cod proc civ*, *art cp* (signifying “Code of Civil Procedure”, and “article civil procedure”, respectively—see lines 1, 5, and 6); *d lgs n*, *lgs n del*, *del d lgs* (“Legislative Decree No.”, and “(of) Legislative no. of”, lines 2, 7 and 13); *legge n del* (“Act no. of”, line 10); *sentenza n del* (“judgment no. of”, line 14), and so on. Such codified language clearly establishes and incorporates underlying legal principles, thus rendering the language of the court as rather cryptographic, although judicially salient. Table 7 illustrates the most frequent 3-grams in *CorCos*. AntConc was employed to retrieve such details.

Table 7. 3-grams in *CorCos*

No.	Type	Back-translations	Freq. pmT
1	<i>Sentenza n del</i>	Judgment no. of	2,174.46
2	<i>Legge n [...] del</i>	Act no. [...] of	2,076.22
3	<i>Della legge n</i>	Of Act no,	1,699.62
4	<i>Di legittimità costituzionale</i>	Of constitutional legitimacy	1,296.82
5	<i>Corte di cassazione</i>	Court of Cassation	959.51
6	<i>Comma della legge</i>	Paragraph of Act	926.77
7	<i>In materia di</i>	In the subject-matter of	903.84
8	<i>Di cui all'</i>	In accordance with	880.92
9	<i>Art [...] della legge</i>	Art. [...] of Act	815.42
10	<i>Art [...] comma [...] del</i>	Art. [...] paragraph [...] of	795.77
11	<i>Costituzionale dell'art</i>	Constitutional of art	789.22
12	<i>D lgs n</i>	Legislative decree no.	789.22
13	<i>Lgs n del</i>	Legislative no. of	785.95
14	<i>Cui all'art</i>	Accordance with art	769.58
15	<i>Di questa corte</i>	Of this court	717.18

Differently from Table 6, Table 7 showcases semantically rich lexical units, such as *di legittimità costituzionale* (“of constitutional legitimacy”, line 4), *in materia di* (“in the subject-matter of”, line 7), or *di questa corte* (“of this court”, line 15). The remaining n-grams serve cohesive purposes as the ones listed in Table 6. Examples are *di cui all’* and *cui all’art* (“in accordance with” and “accordance with art”, line 8 and 14), *art [...] comma [...] del* (“art... paragraph... of”, line 10), etc.

In this sense, the two corpora produce similar n-grams, thus underscoring the importance of referencing when deciding on cases, and interpreting legal and constitutional principles.

Interestingly, the Constitutional Court mentions the Court of Cassation (see line 5), although the latter does not refer to the former. The n-grams listed in Table 6, in fact, do not show any instance of *Corte Costituzionale*, thus focusing primarily on laws, legislative decrees, and own judgments (e.g., *cass n del*, “Cassation no. of”, line 11 of Table 6). This underscores the pivotal role played by the *Corte di Cassazione* in shaping the way laws are interpreted and constitutional values are applied and evolve over time. Additionally, it could be posited that the *Corte Costituzionale* reviews constitutional matters raised by judges and justices, including the ones of the *Corte di Cassazione*.

5. Discussion

The comparative legilinguistic analyses that have been conducted in this paper have foregrounded insightful data. Although the language of the two courts is apparently very similar, a host of differences have been brought to the fore. Namely, the high-frequency analysis denoted very similar word patterning, ranging from the letter “n” (signifying “number”), to key terms such as *comma* (“paragraph”), *corte* (“court”), and *giudice* (“judge”). The key terms and key collocations characterising *CorCass* and *CorCoss* also presented analogous terminology, featuring *comma* collocating with *n* and *corte* in both corpora, for example. This underscores that Italian supreme court justices mostly deal with similar matters and employ analogous key terminology.

Conversely, the examination of the collocations of the word *giudice* revealed some divergences. *CorCos*, for instance, framed very peculiar terms that would

be difficult to understand out of the specific context. Examples in this regard were words such as *terziarietà* (“third-partiness” or “impartiality”), that only characterises the legal and judicial sphere, and *relatore* or *relatrice* (“reporter” or “speaker”), which were considered as polysemous because they do not denote a “speaker”, but actually refer to a justice who relates the facts of a case to the members of the judging panel. Likewise, although less cryptographic, the collocations emerging from *CorCass* were also rather ambiguous. A polysemous term was, for example, *merito*, which does not refer to any “merit” or “credit”, but to a particular type of judge (i.e., *giudice di merito*). The highly specificity of *CorCass* collocations was also evident. Nouns such as *giurisdizione* (“jurisdiction”), *appello* (“appeal”), and the adverb *dinanzi* (“before”), in fact, topped the list.

Similarly to collocations, the keyness analysis revealed the preponderance of ambiguous terminology in both corpora. The language of *CorCass*, for example, distinguished itself from *CorCos* for the use of polysemous words such as *domanda* (referring to “claims” rather than a “question”); *ricorso* (“appeal”); *Cass.* (abbreviation of “cassation”), *sez.* and *sezioni* (both meaning “sections”, or “chambers” of the court). In the same way, the lexical peculiarities of *CorCass* were based on specific terminology such as *costituzionale* and *cost.* (“constitutional”), and the polysemous *questioni* (“questions/matters”) often collocating with *legittimità* (“legitimacy”).

The analysis of 3-grams foregrounded and confirmed other linguistic peculiarities, such as the heavy employment of acronyms and word truncations. Such characteristics were principally noticed in *CorCass*, where *cpc* (“Code of Civil Procedure”) and *d lgs n* (“Legislative decree no.”) topped the list. Slightly differently, the 3-grams obtained from *CorCos* featured more semantically salient words, such as *sentenza n del* (“judgement no. of”), or *legge n del* (“act no. of”), although, as visible, still containing abbreviations.

As a whole, this linguistic investigation showed how *CorCass* and *CorCos* are linguistically relevant corpora that can unveil language patterning, linguistic ambiguities, highly sectoral vocabulary, and word particular usages in the language of the two Italian supreme courts.

6. Conclusions

On the basis of the data gathered, it can be argued that the investigation undertaken contributes to corpus-based lexicological analyses and semiotic studies by uncovering the rhetorical and stylistic strategies of supreme court language. It has provided valuable insights into significant terminology by developing interpretative approaches.

By bridging quantitative corpus analyses with qualitative insights, in fact, this study has displayed how judicial language patterns shape and conflate into lexicology.

Thanks to corpus consultation, this paper has guided through a close reading and understanding of supreme courts' language, thus unveiling how judicial discourse is scaffolded. In this way, it has offered empirical and epistemological evidence of how legal terms can combine with one another to fashion legally binding meanings and are employed in the shaping of socially impactful language.

By scrutinising collocations, key terminology, and n-grams, this investigation has contributed to a deeper understanding of judicial register and what is distinctive in the peculiar wording of the two supreme courts. Lastly, this paper has revealed that linguistic choices have the power to mirror institutional differences, thus shedding light in the complex legal landscape and allowing linguists and scholars to navigate its peculiarities.

The questions that this paper aimed to address were the following: 1) What are the linguistic differences emerging from *CorCass* and *CorCos*?, and 2) Which salient language patterns emerge from the two corpora? In answering both questions, the most salient linguistic traits that emerged from the analyses lie in the fact that both supreme courts leverage highly technical vocabulary with a strong tendency to employ polysemous meanings. This implies that efforts to disambiguate and interpret words must constantly be made and that the language of justices may not be accessible to laypeople. Another relevant aspect revolves around lexical density. Especially *CorCos* featured key terms, n-grams and, to some extent, collocates with notable high frequencies, thus denoting a certain vocabulary fixity. Both *CorCass* and *CorCos* presented cryptographic patterning, often employing acronyms and very succinct abbreviations. This may hinder comprehension to a non-expert readership.

The analysis of frequency, collocation, keyness, and n-grams contributed to discussions in legal semiotics, rhetorical strategies, meaning construction, judicial discourse, and accessibility because these linguistic elements displayed how meaning is shaped in judgments; how courts deploy rhetorical strategies in their decisions, and how legilinguistic complexity and legal language patterning may affect accessibility to justice and to legal discourse for laypeople. Also, the examination carried out confirmed a certain degree of uniformity, homogeneity, and representativeness of justices' discourse. This was expected given the highly specific lexicon under scrutiny.

The implications of this study for the scientific community are manifold. First of all, thanks to the creation of *CorCass* and *CorCos*, scholars can now carry out legilinguistic investigations on the language of recent Italian supreme courts' decisions, thus bringing to the fore nuances, similarities, and recent changes, if any. Secondly, the corpora can be employed as useful tools to reflect on judicial sentencing, and analyse case-based decisions. Thirdly, they can be harnessed to study how the language of judgments has evolved over time, and how justices have exercised their power and authority over the years. Lastly, such corpora foster transparency and accessibility, as they collect salient judicial decisions in coherent datasets available to scholars and linguists.

The epistemological lacunas of this study lie in the limited number of analyses carried out. Key terms, for example, may have been extracted by comparing *CorCass* and *CorCos* with other judicial corpora (e.g., those of appellate courts), thus probably revealing linguistic differences between higher and lower courts. Additionally, this study did not take into account concordance evidence and/or multiword legal expressions, as it primarily relied on the analysis of single lexical items within corpus-driven sample phrases.

Hopefully, further studies will continue unveiling judicial language in *CorCass* and *CorCos*. For example, scholars may explore pragmatic differences, such as stance-taking, in the language of the two corpora. Other research could compare the vocabulary of the Italian supreme courts with the one of international supreme courts when judgments are written or transcribed in Italian.

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